

The Transcendent Unity of Religions

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FRITHJOF
SCHUON

PRESENTED

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The Transcendent Unity of Religions

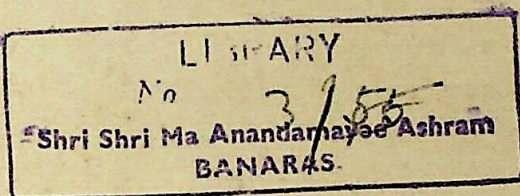
Translated by Peter Townsend

by FRITHJOF SCHUON

The Transcendent Unity of Religions, in Mr. Townsend's admirably clear translation from the French original, introduces to English readers the work of a writer of great erudition and intellectual concentration.

M. Schuon is ~~French~~ ^{German} by birth, but has for some years made his home in Switzerland. His books have made a deep impression in Europe in the last few years, and he has been named by the late Ananda Coomaraswamy as one of the very few who are qualified to interpret authentically the Oriental doctrines.

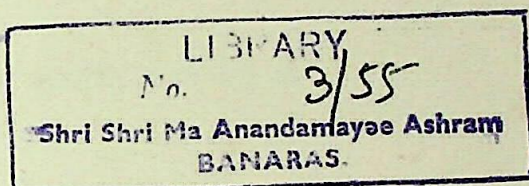
Is there a 'Transcendent Unity' underlying the great religions of mankind? Does not every real religion start from an historic revelation which contains the germ of its whole subsequent development, and does it not necessarily possess both an esoteric and an exoteric aspect? Is humanity divided into a number of 'worlds' each with its appropriate religious tradition? On questions such as these M. Schuon's book throws a new and unusually clear light. His knowledge and understanding of Christianity is no less impressive than his knowledge and understanding of Islam, Judaism and the Vedanta. He is in no sense a syncretist. It is perhaps not too much to say that *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* represents the highest attainment until now in the comparative and synthetic study of Oriental and Occidental religion.



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THE
TRANSCENDENT UNITY OF RELIGIONS



ERRATA SLIP

- p. 41, l. 17, for 'Oabbalah' read 'Qabbalah'
- p. 94, l. 3, for 'eighteenth' read 'eighth'
- p. 162, l. 11, of footnote for 'nationalist' read 'rationalist'
- p. 177, l. 20, for $\kappa\chi\theta$ read $\kappa\alpha\theta$

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Spiritus ubi vult spirat: et vocem eius audis,
sed nescis unde veniat, aut quo vadat: sic est
omnis, qui natus est ex spiritu.

(John iii. 8.)

PREFACE

This book is founded on a doctrine which is metaphysical in the most precise meaning of the word and cannot by any means be described as philosophical. Such a distinction may appear unwarrantable to those who are accustomed to regard metaphysic as a branch of philosophy, but the practice of linking the two together in this manner, although it can be traced back to Aristotle and the Scholastic writers who followed him, merely shows that all philosophy suffers from certain limitations which, even in the most favourable instances such as those just quoted, exclude a completely adequate appreciation of metaphysic. In reality the transcendent character of metaphysic makes it independent of any purely human mode of thought. In order to define clearly the difference between the two modes in question, it may be said that philosophy proceeds from reason (which is a purely individual faculty), whereas metaphysic proceeds exclusively from the Intellect. The latter faculty has been defined by Meister Eckhardt—who fully understood the import of his words—as follows: ‘There is something in the soul which is uncreated and uncreatable; if the whole soul were this it would be uncreated and uncreatable; and this is the Intellect.’ An analogous definition, which is still more concise and even richer in symbolic value, is to be found in Moslem esotericism: ‘The Sufi (that is to say man identified with the Intellect) is uncreated.’

Since purely intellectual knowledge is by definition beyond the reach of the individual, being in its essence supra-individual, universal or divine, and since it proceeds from pure Intelligence,

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which is direct and not discursive, it follows that this knowledge not only goes infinitely farther than reasoning, but even goes farther than faith in the ordinary sense of this term. In other words, intellectual knowledge also transcends the specifically religious point of view, which is itself incomparably superior to the philosophic point of view, since, like metaphysical knowledge, it emanates from God and not from man; but whereas metaphysic proceeds wholly from intellectual intuition, religion proceeds from revelation. The latter is the Word of God spoken to His creatures, whereas intellectual intuition is a direct and active participation in divine Knowledge and not an indirect and passive participation, as is faith. In other words, in the case of intellectual intuition, knowledge is not possessed by the individual in so far as he is an individual, but in so far as in his innermost essence he is not distinct from his divine Principle. Thus metaphysical certitude is absolute because of the identity between the knower and the known in the Intellect. If an example may be drawn from the sensory sphere to illustrate the difference between metaphysical and religious knowledge, it may be said that the former, which can be called 'esoteric' when it is manifested through a religious symbolism, is conscious of the colourless essence of light and of its character of pure luminosity; a given religious belief, on the other hand, will assert that light is red and not green, whereas another belief will assert the opposite; both will be right in so far as they distinguish light from darkness but not in so far as they identify it with a particular colour. This very rudimentary example is designed to show that the religious point of view, because it is based in the minds of believers on a revelation and not on a knowledge that is accessible to each one of them (an unrealizable condition for a large human collectivity), will of necessity confuse the symbol or form with the naked and supra-formal Truth, while metaphysic, which can only be assimilated to a particular 'point of view' in a purely provisional sense, will be able to make use of the same symbol or form as a means of expression, while being aware of its relativity. That is why each of the great and intrinsically orthodox religions can, through

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its dogmas, rites and other symbols, serve as a means of expressing all the truths known directly by the eye of the Intellect, the spiritual organ which is called in Moslem esotericism the 'eye of the heart'.

We have just stated that religion translates metaphysical or universal truths into dogmatic language. Now, though dogma is not accessible to all men in its intrinsic truth, which can only be directly attained by the Intellect, it is none the less accessible through faith, which is, for most people, the only possible mode of participation in the divine truths. As for intellectual knowledge, which, as we have seen, proceeds neither from belief nor from a process of reasoning, it goes beyond dogma in the sense that, without ever contradicting the latter, it penetrates its 'internal dimension', that is, the infinite Truth which dominates all forms.

In order to be absolutely clear on this point we must again insist that the rational mode of knowledge in no way extends beyond the realm of generalities and cannot by itself reach any transcendent truth; if it may nevertheless serve as a means of expressing supra-rational knowledge—as in the case of Aristotelian and Scholastic ontology—this will always be to the detriment of the intellectual integrity of the doctrine. Some may perhaps object that even the purest metaphysic is sometimes hardly distinguishable from philosophy inasmuch as it uses arguments and seems to reach conclusions. But this resemblance is due merely to the fact that all concepts, once they are expressed, are necessarily clothed in the modes of human thought, which is rational and dialectical. What essentially distinguishes the metaphysical from the philosophical proposition is that the former is symbolical and descriptive, in the sense that it makes use of rational modes as symbols to describe or translate knowledge possessing a greater degree of certainty than any knowledge of a sensible order, whereas philosophy—called, not without reason, *ancilla theologiae*—is never anything more than what it expresses. When philosophy uses reason to resolve a doubt, this proves precisely that its starting point is a doubt which it is striving to overcome, whereas we have seen that the starting

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point of a metaphysical formulation is always essentially something intellectually evident or certain, which is communicated, to those able to receive it, by symbolical or dialectical means designed to awaken in them the latent knowledge which they bear unconsciously and 'eternally' within them.

To illustrate the three modes of thought we have been considering let us apply them to the idea of God. The philosophical point of view, when it does not purely and simply deny God even if only by ascribing to the word a meaning it does not possess, tries to 'prove' God by all kinds of argument; in other words, this point of view tries to 'prove' either the 'existence' or the 'non-existence' of God, as though reason, which is only an intermediary and in no wise a source of transcendent knowledge, could 'prove' anything one wished to prove. Moreover this pretension of reason to autonomy in realms where only intellectual intuition on the one hand and revelation on the other can communicate knowledge, is characteristic of the philosophical point of view and shows up all its inadequacy. The religious point of view does not, for its part, trouble itself about proving God—it is even prepared to admit that such proof is impossible—but bases itself on belief. It must be added here that 'faith' cannot be reduced to a simple matter of belief; otherwise Christ would not have spoken of the 'faith which moves mountains', for it goes without saying that ordinary religious belief has no such power. Finally, from the metaphysical standpoint, there is no longer any question either of 'proof' or of 'belief' but solely of direct evidence, of intellectual evidence that implies absolute certainty; but in the present state of humanity such evidence is only accessible to a spiritual *élite* which becomes ever more restricted in number. It may be added that religion, by its very nature and independently of any wish of its representatives, who may be unaware of the fact, contains and transmits this purely intellectual Knowledge beneath the veil of its dogmatic and ritual symbols, as we have already seen.

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The truths just expressed are not the exclusive possession of any school or individual; were it otherwise they would not be truths, for these cannot be invented, but must necessarily be known in every integral traditional civilization, whether its form be religious as in the West and Near East or metaphysical as in India and the Far East. As for the modern West, which owed its origin to an almost complete forgetfulness of these truths, they have been formulated—for the first time, we believe, in writings and books—by René Guénon, who in a series of remarkable works took upon himself the task of interpreting the still living intellectuality of the East and more especially of India. A study of these works would in itself be of the greatest value and would moreover facilitate the understanding of the present book, since we have borrowed from them, very willingly but also of necessity, a part of our terminology. Conversely the reading of this book will help those who are interested to understand the books of René Guénon, which have the great merit, besides that of pure intellectuality, of either directly expounding or frequently referring to the traditional doctrines, which alone count in our eyes and which alone open up unlimited spiritual horizons. At this point it is important to state—and this cannot be too often repeated—that the publication of books such as those just mentioned has not the slightest connection with any kind of proselytism. Proselytism consists not in writing books for the benefit of those who desire to understand and are capable of doing so, but in writing them for the sake of convincing, at any price, the greatest possible number, which leads to the vulgarizing and falsifying of ideas in order to bring them 'within the grasp of everyone'. René Guénon often laid stress on this distinction, which is not in the least difficult to grasp, though we may well believe that it is to the interest of some people to ignore it. It might, however, reasonably be asked for what human and cosmic reasons truths which may in a very general sense be called 'esoteric' should be brought to light and

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made explicit at the present time, in an age which is so little inclined to speculation. There is indeed something abnormal in this, but it lies, not in the fact of the exposition of these truths, but in the general conditions of our age, which marks the end of a great cyclic period of terrestrial humanity—the end of a *Mahā-yuga* according to Hindu cosmology—and so must recapitulate or manifest again in one way or another everything that is included in the cycle, in conformity with the adage ‘extremes meet’; thus things which are in themselves abnormal may become necessary by reason of the conditions just referred to. From a more individual point of view, that of mere expediency, it must be admitted that the spiritual confusion of our times has reached such a pitch that the harm which might in principal befall certain people from contact with the truths in question is compensated by the advantages others will derive from the self-same truths; again, the term ‘esotericism’ has been so often misused in order to cloak ideas which are as unspiritual as they are dangerous, and what is known of esoteric doctrines has been so frequently plagiarized and deformed—not to mention the fact that the outward and readily exaggerated incompatibility of the different traditional forms greatly discredits, in the minds of most of our contemporaries, all tradition, religious or otherwise—that it is not only desirable but even incumbent upon one to give some idea, firstly, of what true esotericism is and what it is not, and secondly of what it is that constitutes the profound and eternal solidarity of all spiritual forms.

There is one further point to which brief reference should be made. The most specifically modern thought readily makes the mistake of introducing the psychological notion of ‘genius’ into the intellectual sphere, a sphere which is exclusively that of truth. In the name of ‘genius’ every distortion of the normal functioning of the intelligence seems to be permitted and the most elementary logic is more and more readily rejected on the ground that it is lacking in originality and therefore ‘tedious’, ‘tiresome’ or ‘pedantic’. However it is not the person who applies principles who is the pedant, but only the person who applies them badly; moreover the ‘creative genius’, by a curious

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derogation of his 'inspiration', is never short of 'principles' when he needs some illusory pretexts for gratifying his mental passions. We have only one concern—to express the impersonal and uncoloured Truth—so that it will be useless to look for anything 'profoundly human' in this book, any more than in those of René Guénon, for the simple reason that nothing human is profound; nor will there be found therein any 'living wisdom', for wisdom is independent of such contingencies as life and death, and life can add no value to something which possesses none in itself—quite the contrary. In the spiritual realm there is no 'life' other than holiness, whatever may be its mode, and this always rests precisely upon what 'dynamists' and other modern illogicians would call 'dead' wisdom. We are well aware that, psychologically speaking, the introduction of a sort of 'impressionism' or 'expressionism' into the realm of ideas is the result of a reaction against a flat and sterile rationalism; but this is neither an excuse nor a matter for congratulation, since a 'reaction' is always a sign of intellectual feebleness and a true doctrine never springs from psychological causes.

Lastly it should be added that we are not among those who believe that reality should conform to their own desire for simplification; complex, not to say 'complicated' truths do exist and it is not enough to deny them in order to deprive them of the reality which they possess in themselves and outside us. The 'simplicity' of an idea is by no means a gauge of its truth, as the most modern thinkers seem to believe, and while it is undeniable that anything can be expressed simply, it is none the less true that simple language, when used to convey truths of a metaphysical or esoteric order, will constitute a symbolism which will be all the more difficult to penetrate, at least for the profane reader, the more lofty the order to which its content belongs. Such language, which is moreover that used by the sacred Scriptures, will run the risk of being even less accessible than the most subtle demonstration.

To come now to the main subject of this book, it must be emphasized that the unity of the different religions, or, more generally, of the different traditional forms, is not only un-

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realizable on the external level, that of the forms themselves, but ought not to be realized at that level, even were this possible, for in that case the revealed forms would be deprived of their sufficient reason. The very fact that they are revealed shows that they are willed by the Divine Word. If the expression 'transcendent unity' is used, it means that the unity of the traditional forms, whether they are religious or supra-religious in their nature, must be realized in a purely inward and spiritual way and without prejudice to any particular form. The antagonisms between these forms no more affect the one universal Truth than the antagonisms between opposing colours affect the transmission of the one uncoloured light (to return to the illustration used already). Just as every colour, by its negation of darkness and its affirmation of light, provides the possibility of discovering the ray which makes it visible and of tracing this ray back to its luminous source, so all forms, all symbols, all religions, all dogmas, by their negation of error and their affirmation of Truth, make it possible to follow the ray of Revelation, which is none other than the ray of the Intellect, back as far as its Divine Source.

Chapter I

CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS

The true and complete understanding of an idea goes far beyond the first apprehension of the idea by the intelligence, although more often than not this apprehension is taken for understanding itself. While it is true that the immediate evidence conveyed to us by any particular idea is, on its own level, a real understanding, there can be no question of its embracing the whole extent of the idea since it is primarily the sign of an aptitude to understand that idea in its completeness. Any truth can in fact be understood at different levels and according to different 'conceptual dimensions', that is to say according to an indefinite number of modalities which correspond to all the possible aspects, likewise indefinite in number, of the truth in question. This way of regarding ideas accordingly leads to the question of spiritual realization, the doctrinal expressions of which clearly illustrate the 'dimensional indefiniteness' of theoretical conceptions.

Philosophy, considered from the standpoint of its limitations—and it is the limitations of philosophy which confer upon it its specific character—is based on the systematic ignoring of what has been stated above. In other words, philosophy ignores what would be its own negation; moreover, it concerns itself solely with mental 'schemes' which, with its claim to universality, it likes to regard as absolute, although from the point of view of spiritual realization these schemes are merely so many virtual or potential and unused objects, in so far at least as they refer to true ideas; when, however, this is not the case, as practically always occurs in modern philosophy, these schemes are reduced to

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the condition of mere devices that are unusable from a speculative point of view and are therefore without any real value. As for true ideas, those, that is to say, which more or less implicitly suggest aspects of the total Truth, and hence this Truth itself, they become by that very fact intellectual 'keys' and indeed have no other function; this is something that metaphysical thought alone is capable of grasping. So far as philosophical or ordinary theological thought is concerned, there is on the contrary an ignorance affecting not only the nature of the ideas which are believed to be completely understood, but also and above all the scope of theory as such; theoretical understanding is in fact transitory and limited by definition, though its limits can only be more or less approximately defined.

The purely 'theoristic' understanding of an idea, which we have so termed because of the limitative tendency which paralyzes it, may justly be characterized by the word 'dogmatism'; religious dogma in fact, at least to the extent to which it is supposed to exclude other conceptual forms, though certainly not in itself, represents an idea considered in conformity with a 'theoristic' tendency, and this exclusive way of looking at ideas has even become characteristic of the religious point of view as such. A religious dogma ceases, however, to be limited in this way once it is understood in the light of its inherent truth, which is of a universal order, and this is the case in all esotericism. On the other hand, the ideas formulated in esotericism and in metaphysical doctrines generally may in their turn be understood according to the dogmatic or 'theoristic' tendency, and the case is then analogous to that of the religious dogmatism of which we have just spoken. In this connection, we must again point out that a religious dogma is not a dogma in itself but solely by the fact of being considered as such and through a sort of confusion of the idea with the form in which it is clothed; on the other hand, the outward dogmatization of universal truths is perfectly justified in view of the fact that these truths or ideas, in having to provide the foundation of a tradition, must be capable of being assimilated in some degree by all men. Dogmatism as such does not consist in the mere enuncia-

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tion of an idea, that is to say in the fact of giving form to a spiritual intuition, but rather in an interpretation which, instead of rejoining the formless and total Truth after taking as its starting point one of the forms of that Truth, results in a sort of paralysis of this form by denying its intellectual potentialities and by attributing to it an absoluteness which only the formless and total Truth itself can possess.

Dogmatism reveals itself not only by its inability to conceive the inward or implicit illimitability of the symbol, the universality which resolves all outward oppositions, but also by its inability to recognize, when faced with two apparently contradictory truths, the inward connection which they implicitly affirm, a connection which makes of them complementary aspects of one and the same truth. One might illustrate this in the following manner: whoever participates in universal Knowledge will regard two apparently contradictory truths as he would two points situated on one and the same circumference which links them together by its continuity and so reduces them to unity; in the measure in which these points are distant from, and thus opposed to, one another, there will be contradiction, and this contradiction will reach its maximum when the two points are situated at the extremities of a diameter of the circle; but this extreme opposition or contradiction only appears as a result of isolating the points under consideration from the circle and ignoring the existence of the latter. One may conclude from this that a dogmatic affirmation, that is to say an affirmation which is inseparable from its form and admits no other, is comparable to a point, which by definition, as it were, contradicts all other possible points; a speculative formulation, on the other hand, is comparable to an element of a circle, the very form of which indicates its logical and ontological continuity and therefore the whole circle or, by analogical transposition, the whole Truth; this comparison will, perhaps, suggest in the clearest possible way the difference which separates a dogmatic affirmation from a speculative formulation.

The outward and intentional contradictoriness of speculative formulations may show itself, it goes without saying, not only in

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a single, logically paradoxical formula such as the Vedic *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am *Brahma*)—or the Vedantic definition of the *Yogī*—or the *Anal-Haqq* (I am the Truth) of El Hallaj, or Christ's words concerning His Divinity, but also, and for even stronger reasons, as between different formulations each of which may be logically homogeneous in itself. Examples of the latter may be found in all sacred Scriptures, notably in the Qoran: we need only recall the apparent contradiction between the affirmations regarding predestination and those regarding free-will, affirmations which are only contradictory in the sense that they express opposite aspects of a single reality. However, apart from these paradoxical formulations—whether they are so in themselves or in relation to one another—there also remain certain theories which, although expressing the strictest orthodoxy, are nevertheless in outward contradiction one with another, this being due to the diversity of their respective points of view, which are not chosen arbitrarily and artificially but are established spontaneously by virtue of a genuine intellectual originality.

To return to what was said above about the understanding of ideas, a theoretical notion may be compared to the view of an object. Just as this view does not reveal all possible aspects, or in other words the integral nature of the object, the perfect knowledge of which would be nothing less than identity with it, so a theoretical notion does not itself correspond to the integral truth, of which it necessarily suggests only one aspect, essential or otherwise.* In the example just given error corresponds to an

* In a treatise directed against rationalist philosophy, El-Ghazzālī speaks of certain blind men who, not having even a theoretical knowledge of an elephant, came across this animal one day and started to feel the different parts of its body; as a result each man represented the animal to himself according to the limb which he touched: for the first, who touched a foot, the elephant resembled a column, whereas for the second, who touched one of the tusks, it resembled a stake, and so on. By this parable El-Ghazzālī seeks to show the error involved in trying to enclose the universal within a fragmentary notion of it, or within isolated and exclusive 'aspects' or 'points of view'. Shri Ramakrishna also uses this parable to demonstrate the inadequacy of dogmatic exclusiveness in its negative aspect. The same idea could however be expressed by means of an even more adequate example:

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inadequate view of the object whereas a dogmatic conception is comparable to the exclusive view of one aspect of the object, a view which supposes the immobility of the seeing subject. As for a speculative and therefore intellectually unlimited conception, this may be compared to the sum of all possible views of the object in question, views which presuppose in the subject a power of displacement or an ability to alter his viewpoint, hence a certain mode of identity with the dimensions of space, which themselves effectually reveal the integral nature of the object, at least with respect to its form which is all that is in question in the example given. Movement in space is in fact an active participation in the possibilities of space, whereas static extension in space, the form of our bodies for example, is a passive participation in these same possibilities. This may be transposed without difficulty to a higher plane and one may then speak of an 'intellectual space', namely the cognitive all-possibility which is fundamentally the same as the divine Omniscience, and consequently of 'intellectual dimensions' which are the 'internal' modalities of this Omniscience; Knowledge through the Intellect is none other than the perfect participation of the subject in these modalities, and in the physical world this participation is effectively represented by movement. When speaking, therefore, of the understanding of ideas, we may distinguish between a 'dogmatic' understanding, comparable to the view of an object from a single viewpoint, and an integral or speculative understanding, comparable to the indefinite series of possible views of the object, views which are realized through indefinitely multiple changes of point of view. Just as, when the eye changes its position, the different views of an object are connected by a perfect continuity, which represents, so to speak, the determining reality of the object, so the different aspects of a truth, however contradictory they may appear and notwithstanding their indefinite multiplicity, describe the integral

faced with any object, some might say that it 'is' a certain shape, while others might say that it 'is' such and such a material; others again might maintain that it 'is' such and such a number or such and such a weight, and so forth.

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Truth which surpasses and determines them. We would again refer here to an illustration we have already used; a dogmatic affirmation corresponds to a point which, as such, contradicts by definition every other point, whereas a speculative formulation is always conceived as an element of a circle which by its very form indicates principally its own continuity, and hence the entire circle and the Truth in its entirety.

It follows from the above that in speculative doctrines it is the 'point of view' on the one hand and the 'aspect' on the other hand which determine the form of the affirmation, whereas in dogmatism the affirmation is confused with a determinate point of view and aspect, thus excluding all others.*

* The Angels are intelligences which are limited to a particular 'aspect' of Divinity; consequently an angelic state is a sort of transcendent 'point of view'. On a lower plane, the 'intellectuality' of animals and of the more peripheral species of the terrestrial state, that of plants for example, corresponds cosmologically to the angelic intellectuality: what differentiates one vegetable species from another is in reality simply the mode of its 'intelligence'; in other words, it is the form or rather the integral nature of a plant which reveals the state—eminently passive of course—of contemplation or knowledge of its species; we say 'of its species' advisedly, because, considered in isolation, a plant does not constitute an individual. We would recall here that the Intellect, being universal, must be discoverable in everything that exists, to whatever order it belongs; the same is not true of reason, which is only a specifically human faculty and is in no way identical with intelligence, either our own or that of other beings.

Chapter II

THE LIMITATIONS OF
EXOTERICISM

I

The exoteric point of view, which, strictly speaking, only exists in traditions which are religious in form—at least in so far as it implies a certain attitude of exclusion towards the higher truths—is fundamentally the point of view of individual interest considered in its highest sense, that is to say extended to cover the whole cycle of existence of the individual and not limited solely to terrestrial life. This superior interest is identical with what is called 'salvation' and clearly is not in itself of a transcendent order. Exoteric or religious truth therefore is limited by definition, by reason of the very limitation of the end it sets itself, without this restriction, however, affecting the esoteric interpretation of which that same truth is susceptible thanks to the universality of its symbolism, or rather, first and foremost, thanks to the two-fold nature, 'inward' and 'outward', of Revelation itself; whence it follows that a dogma is both a limited idea and an unlimited symbol at one and the same time. To give an example, we may say that the dogma of the unicity of the Church of God must exclude a truth such as that of the validity of other orthodox traditional forms, because the idea of traditional universality is of no particular usefulness for the purpose of salvation and may even exert a prejudicial effect on it, since, in the case of persons not possessing the capacity to rise above an individual standpoint, this

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idea would almost inevitably result in religious indifference and hence in the neglect of those religious duties the accomplishment of which is precisely the principal condition of salvation. On the other hand, this same idea of traditional universality—an idea which is more or less indispensable to the way of total and disinterested Truth—is none the less included symbolically and metaphysically in the dogmatic or theological definition of the Church or of the Mystical Body of Christ; or again, to use the language of the other two monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, we may find in the respective conceptions of the 'Chosen Race', *Israël* and 'submission', *El-Islām*, a dogmatic symbol of the idea of universal orthodoxy, the *Sanātana-Dharma* of the Hindus.

It goes without saying that the 'outward' limitation of dogma, which is precisely what confers upon it its dogmatic character, is perfectly legitimate, since the individual viewpoint to which this limitation corresponds is a reality at its own level of existence. It is because of this relative reality that the individual viewpoint, except to the extent to which it implies the negation of a higher perspective, that is to say in so far as it is limited by the mere fact of its nature, can and even must be integrated in one fashion or another in every way possessing a transcendent goal. Regarded from this standpoint, exotericism, or rather form as such, will no longer imply an intellectually restricted perspective but will play the part of an accessory spiritual means, without the transcendence of the esoteric doctrine being in any way affected thereby, no limitation being imposed on the latter for reasons of individual expediency. One must not therefore confuse the function of the exoteric viewpoint as such with the function of exotericism as a spiritual means: the viewpoint in question is incompatible, in one and the same consciousness, with esoteric knowledge, for the latter dissolves this viewpoint as a preliminary to re-absorbing it into the centre from which it came; but the exoteric means do not for that reason cease to be utilizable, and will, in fact, be used in two ways, on the one hand by intellectual transposition into the esoteric order—in which case they will act as supports of intel-

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lectual 'actualization'—and on the other hand by their regulating action on the individual portion of the being.

The exoteric aspect of a Tradition is thus a providential disposition which, far from being blameworthy, is necessary in view of the fact that the esoteric way can only concern a minority, especially under the present conditions of terrestrial humanity, and because for the mass of mankind there is nothing better than the ordinary path of salvation. What is blameworthy is not the existence of exotericism, but rather its all-invading autocracy—due primarily perhaps, in the Christian world, to the narrow 'precision' of the Latin mind—which causes many of those who would be qualified for the way of pure knowledge not only to stop short at the outward aspect of the Tradition, but even to reject entirely an esotericism which they only know through a veil of prejudice and deformation, unless indeed, not finding anything in exotericism to match their intelligence, they be caused to stray into false and artificial doctrines in an attempt to find something which exotericism does not offer them, and even takes it upon itself to prohibit.*

The exoteric viewpoint is, in fact, doomed to end by negating itself from the moment that it is no longer vivified by the presence within it of the esotericism of which it is both the outward radiation and the veil. So it is that religion, according to the measure in which it denies metaphysical and initiatory realities and becomes crystallized in a literalistic dogmatism, inevitably engenders unbelief; the atrophy which overtakes dogmas when they are deprived of their 'internal dimension' recoils upon them from the outside, in the form of heretical and atheistic negations.

2

The presence of an esoteric nucleus in a civilization possessing a specifically religious character guarantees to it a normal

* This recalls the denunciation uttered by Christ: 'Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in, ye hindered.' (St. Luke xi. 52.)

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development and a maximum of stability; this nucleus, however, is not in any sense a part, even an inner part, of the exotericism, but represents, on the contrary, a quasi-independent 'dimension' in relation to the latter.* Once this 'dimension' or 'nucleus' ceases to exist, which can only happen in quite abnormal, though cosmologically necessary, circumstances, the traditional edifice is shaken, or even suffers a partial collapse, and finally becomes reduced to its most external elements, namely 'literalism' and sentimentality;† moreover the most tangible criteria of such a decadence are on the one hand the failure to recognize, even to the point of denial, metaphysical and initiatory exegesis, that is to say the 'mystical sense' of the Scriptures—an exegesis which has moreover a close connection with all aspects of the intellectuality of the traditional form under consideration—and on the other hand, the rejection of sacred art, that is to say of the inspired and symbolic forms by means of which that intellectuality is radiated and so communicated in an immediate and unrestricted language to all intelligences. This may not perhaps be quite sufficient to explain why it is that exotericism has indirectly need of esotericism, we do not say in order to enable it to exist, since the mere fact of its existence is not in question any more than the incorruptibility of its means of

* So far as the Islamic Tradition is concerned, we may quote the following observations of an Indian Moslem prince: 'The majority of non-Moslems, and even many Moslems who have been brought up in a European cultural environment, are ignorant of this particular element of Islam which is both its marrow and its centre, which gives life and force to its outer forms and activities and which by reason of the universal nature of its content can call to witness the disciples of other religions.' (Nawab A. Hydari Hydar Nawaz Jung Bahadur, in his preface to *Studies in Tasawwuf* by Khaja Khan.)

† Hence the increasingly marked predominance of 'literature', in the derogatory sense of the word, over genuine intellectuality on the one hand and true piety on the other; hence also the exaggerated importance which is accorded to more or less futile activities of every kind which always carefully avoid the 'one thing necessary.'

In this connection, the influence of the Bergsonian virus on Catholic thought, still so prudent in other respects, is an astonishing and highly regrettable fact, all the more so since this influence seems to lead in some cases to a foolish depreciation of the Greek Fathers and the Scholastics; Catholics, who are the heirs of such a great intellectual patrimony, should not really find it necessary to dispute the territory of modern philosophers.

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grace, but simply to enable it to exist in normal conditions. The fact is that the presence of this 'transcendent dimension' at the centre of the traditional form provides its exoteric side with a life-giving sap, universal and 'paracletic' in its essence, without which it will be compelled to fall back entirely upon itself and, left thus to its own resources which are limited by definition, will end by becoming a sort of 'massive' and 'opaque' body the very density of which will inevitably produce 'fissures', as is shown by the modern history of Christianity. In other words, when exotericism is deprived of the complex and subtle interferences of its 'transcendent dimension', it finds itself ultimately overwhelmed by the 'exteriorized' consequences of its own limitations, the latter having become, as it were, 'total'.

Now, if one proceeds from the idea that exotericists do not understand esotericism and that they have in fact a right not to understand it or even to consider it non-existent, one must also recognize their right to condemn certain manifestations of esotericism which seem to encroach on their own territory and cause 'offence', to use the Gospel expression; but how is one to explain the fact that in most, if not all, cases of this nature, the accusers divest themselves of this right by the iniquitous manner in which they proceed? It is certainly not their more or less natural incomprehension, nor the defence of their genuine right, but solely the perfidiousness of the means which they employ which constitutes what amounts to a 'sin against the Holy Ghost';* this perfidiousness proves, moreover, that the accusa-

* Thus neither lack of understanding on the part of the religious authority concerned, nor even a certain basis of truth in the accusations brought by it, can excuse the iniquity of the proceedings instituted against the Sufi El-Hallaj, any more than the incomprehension of the Jews can excuse the iniquity of their proceedings against Christ. Another example, which had grave consequences for Western Christianity, is afforded by the destruction of the Templars; even admitting that there were certain justifiable grounds of complaint against them, as some persons erroneously maintain, can the utterly ignoble character of the trial be justified, and is it not a sure proof that the charges brought against them were founded on nothing more than the shameful personal and political motives of the person whom Dante calls *il nuovo Pilato si crudele*?

In a similar connection, one may ask why so much stupidity and bad faith

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tions which they find it necessary to formulate, generally serve only as a pretext for gratifying an instinctive hatred of everything which seems to threaten their superficial equilibrium, which is really only a form of individualism, therefore of ignorance.

3

We remember once hearing it said that 'metaphysic is not necessary for salvation'; now this is basically false as a generalization, since a man who is a metaphysician by 'nature' and is aware of it cannot find his salvation by the negation of the very thing which draws him towards God; moreover, any spiritual life must of necessity be based on a natural predisposition which determines its mode, and this is what is termed 'vocation'; no spiritual authority would advise a man to follow a way for which he was not made. This is the lesson of the parable of the talents, to mention but one example, and the same meaning is implicit in the following texts from St. James: 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all', and 'therefore, to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him is sin'; now the essence of the Law, according to Christ's words, is to love God with our whole being, including the intelligence which is its central part. In other words, since we should love God with all that we are, we should also love Him with our intelligence, which is the best part of us. No one will contest the fact that intelligence is not a feeling but something infinitely greater; it follows, therefore, that the word

are to be found in religious polemics, even amongst men who are otherwise free from such failings; this is a sure sign that the majority of these polemics are tainted with the 'sin against the Holy Ghost'. No blame can be attached to a person for attacking a foreign Tradition in the name of his own belief, if it is done through ignorance purely and simply; when, however, this is not the case, the person will be guilty of blasphemy, since, by outraging the Divine Truth in an alien form, he is merely profiting by an opportunity to offend God without having to trouble his own conscience. This is the real explanation of the gross and impure zeal displayed by those who, in the name of their religious convictions, devote their lives to making sacred things appear odious, a task they can only accomplish by contemptible methods.

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'love' as used in the New Testament to indicate the relationship that exists between man and God, and especially between God and man, cannot be understood in a purely sentimental sense and must mean something more than mere desire. On the other hand, if love is the inclining of one being towards another, with a view to union, it is Knowledge which, by definition, will bring about the most perfect union between man and God, since it alone appeals to what is already divine in man, namely the Intellect; this supreme mode of the 'love of God' is therefore by far the highest human possibility and no man can wilfully ignore it without 'sinning against the Holy Ghost'. To pretend that metaphysic, in itself and for all men, is a superfluous thing and in no case necessary for salvation, amounts not only to misjudging its nature, but also to denying the right to exist to those men who have been endowed by God with the quality of intelligence in a transcendent degree.

A further observation may also be made which is relevant to this question. Salvation is merited by action, in the widest sense of the word, and this explains why certain people may be led into disparaging intelligence, since the latter is able to render action superfluous, while its wider possibilities show up the relativity of merit and of the perspective attached to it. Also the specifically religious point of view has a tendency to consider pure intellectuality, which it hardly ever distinguishes from mere rationality, as being more or less opposed to meritorious action and therefore dangerous for salvation; it is for this reason that there are people who are quite ready to attribute to intelligence a Luciferian aspect and who speak without hesitation of 'intellectual pride', as if this were not a contradiction in terms; hence also the exaltation of 'childlike' or 'simple' faith, which indeed we are the first to respect when it is spontaneous and natural, but not when it is theoretical and affected.

It is not uncommon to hear the following view expressed: since salvation implies a state of perfect beatitude and religion insists upon nothing more, why choose the way which has 'deification' for its goal? To this objection we will reply that the esoteric way, by definition, cannot be the object of a 'choice' by

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those who follow it, for it is not man who chooses the way, it is the way which chooses the man. In other words, the question of a choice does not arise, since the finite cannot choose the Infinite; rather is the question one of 'vocation', and those who are 'called', to use the Gospel expression, cannot ignore the call without committing a 'sin against the Holy Ghost', any more than a man can legitimately ignore the obligations of his religion.

If it is incorrect to speak of a 'choice' with reference to the Infinite, it is equally wrong to speak of a 'desire', since it is not a 'desire' for divine Reality that characterizes the initiate, but rather a 'logical' and 'ontological' tendency towards his own transcendent Essence. This definition is of extreme importance.

4

Exoteric doctrine as such, considered, that is to say, apart from the 'spiritual influence' which is capable of acting on souls independently of it, by no means possesses absolute certitude. Theological knowledge cannot by itself shut out the 'temptations' of doubt, even in the case of great mystics; as for the influences of Grace which may intervene in such cases, they are not consubstantial with the intelligence, so that their permanence does not depend on the being who benefits from them. Exoteric ideology being limited to a relative point of view, that of individual salvation—an interested point of view which even influences the conception of Divinity in a restrictive sense—possesses no means of proof or doctrinal credentials proportionate to its own exigencies. Every exoteric doctrine is in fact characterized by a disproportion between its dogmatic demands and its dialectical guarantees: for its demands are absolute as deriving from the Divine Will and therefore also from Divine Knowledge, whereas its guarantees are relative, because they are independent of this Will and based, not on divine Knowledge, but on a human point of view, that of reason and sentiment. For instance, Brahmins are invited to abandon completely a Tradition which has lasted for several thousands of

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years, one which has provided the spiritual support of innumerable generations and has produced flowers of wisdom and holiness down to our times. The arguments which are produced to justify this extraordinary demand are in no wise logically conclusive, nor do they bear any proportion to the magnitude of the demand; the reasons which the Brahmins have for remaining faithful to their spiritual patrimony are therefore infinitely stronger than the reasons by which it is sought to persuade them to cease being what they are. The disproportion, from the Hindu point of view, between the immense reality of the Brahmanic tradition and the insufficiency of the religious counter-arguments is such as to prove quite sufficiently that had God wished to submit the world to one religion only, the arguments put forward on behalf of this religion would not be so feeble, nor those of certain so-called 'heathen' so powerful; in other words, if God were on the side of one traditional form only, the persuasive power of this form would be such that no man of good faith would be able to resist it. Moreover, the application of the term 'heathen' to civilizations which are, with one exception, very much older than Christianity and which have every spiritual and historic right to ignore the latter, provides a further demonstration, by the very illogicality of its naïve pretensions, of the perverted nature of the religious claims with regard to other orthodox traditional forms.

An absolute requirement to believe in one particular religion and not in another cannot in fact be justified save by eminently relative means, as, for example, by attempted philosophico-theological, historical or sentimental proofs; in reality, however, no proofs exist in support of such claims to the unique and exclusive truth, and any attempt so made can only concern the individual dispositions of men, which, being ultimately reducible to a question of credulity, are as relative as can be. Every exoteric perspective claims, by definition, to be the only true and legitimate one. This is because the exoteric point of view, being concerned only with an individual interest, namely salvation, has no advantage to gain from knowledge of the truth of other traditional forms. Being uninterested as to its own

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truth, it is even less interested in the truth of other Traditions, or rather it denies this truth, since the idea of a plurality of traditional forms might be prejudicial to the exclusive pursuit of individual salvation. This clearly shows up the relativity of form as such, though the latter is none the less an absolute necessity for the salvation of the individual. It might be asked, however, why the guarantees, that is to say the proofs of veracity or credibility, which religious polemicists do their utmost to produce, do not derive spontaneously from the Divine Will, as is the case with religious demands. Obviously such a question has no meaning unless it relates to truths, for one cannot prove errors; the arguments of religious controversy are, however, in no way dependent upon the intrinsic and positive domain of faith; an idea which has only an 'extrinsic' and 'negative' significance and which, fundamentally, is merely the result of an induction—such, for example, as the idea of the exclusive truth and legitimacy of a particular religion or, which comes to the same thing, of the falsity and illegitimacy of all other possible Traditions—an idea such as this evidently cannot be the object of proof, whether this proof be divine or, for still stronger reasons, human. So far as genuine dogmas are concerned—that is to say, dogmas which are not derived by induction but are of a strictly 'intrinsic' character—if God has not given theoretical 'proofs' of their truth it is in the first place because such 'proofs' are inconceivable and non-existent on the exoteric plane, and to demand them as unbelievers do would be a pure and simple contradiction; secondly, as we shall see later, if such 'proofs' do in fact exist, it is on quite a different plane, and the Divine Revelation most certainly implies them, without any omission. Moreover, to return to the exoteric plane where alone this question is relevant, the Revelation in its essential aspect is sufficiently intelligible to enable it to serve as a vehicle for the action of Grace,* and Grace is the only sufficient and fully valid

* A typical example of conversion by spiritual influence or Grace, without any doctrinal argument, is afforded by the well-known case of Sundar Singh; this Sikh, who was of noble birth and the possessor of a mystical temperament, though lacking in real intellectual qualities, was the sworn enemy, not only of Christians, but of Christianity and Christ Himself; his hatred, by

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reason for adhering to a religion. However, since this action of Grace only concerns those who do not in fact possess its equivalent under some other revealed form, the dogmas remain without persuasive power, we may say without 'proofs', for those who do possess this equivalent. Such people are therefore 'unconvertible'—leaving aside certain cases of conversion due to the suggestive force of a collective psychism, in which case Grace only intervenes *a posteriori*,† for the spiritual influence can have no hold over them, just as one light cannot illuminate another. This is in conformity with the Divine Will which has distributed the one Truth under different forms or, to express it in another way, between different humanities, each one of which is symbolically the only one. It may be added that if the extrinsic relativity of exotericism is in conformity with the Divine Will, which affirms itself in this way according to the very nature of things, it goes without saying that this relativity cannot be done away with by any human will.

Thus, having shown that no rigorous proof exists to support an exoteric claim to the exclusive possession of the truth, must we not now go further and admit that even the orthodoxy of a traditional form cannot be proved? Such a conclusion would be highly artificial and, in any case, completely erroneous, since there is implicit in every traditional form an absolute proof of

reason of its paradoxical co-existence with his noble and mystical nature, came up against the spiritual influence of Christ and turned to despair; then he had a vision which brought about an immediate conversion. The interesting point is that Christian doctrine took no part in his conversion and the idea of seeking traditional orthodoxy had never even occurred to him. The case of St. Paul presents certain purely 'technical' analogies with this example, though on a considerably higher level both as regards the person involved and the circumstances. As a general proposition it can be stated that when a man possessing a religious nature hates and persecutes a religion, he is, circumstances permitting, on the verge of being converted to it.

† This is the case of those non-Christians who become converted to Christianity in much the same manner as they adopt no matter what form of modern Western civilization; the Western thirst for novelty becomes here a thirst for change, or might one say for denial; both attitudes reveal the same tendency to realize and exhaust possibilities which the traditional civilization had excluded.

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its truth and so of its orthodoxy; what cannot be proved, for want of absolute proof, is not the intrinsic truth, hence the traditional legitimacy, of a form of the universal Revelation, but solely the hypothetical fact that any particular form is the only true and legitimate one, and if this cannot be proved it is for the simple reason that it is untrue.

There are, therefore, irrefutable proofs of the truth of a Tradition; but these proofs, which are of a purely spiritual order, while being the only possible proofs in support of a revealed truth, entail at the same time a denial of the pretensions to exclusiveness of the form. In other words, he who sets out to prove the truth of one religion either has no proofs, since such proofs do not exist, or else he has the proofs which affirm all traditional truth without exception, whatever the form in which it may have clothed itself.

5

The exoteric claim to the exclusive possession of a unique truth, or of Truth without epithet, is therefore an error purely and simply; in reality, every expressed truth necessarily assumes a form, that of its expression, and it is metaphysically impossible that any form should possess a unique value to the exclusion of other forms; for a form, by definition, cannot be unique and exclusive, that is to say it cannot be the only possible expression of what it expresses. Form implies specification or distinction, and the specific is only conceivable as a modality of a 'species', that is to say of a category which includes a combination of analogous modalities. Again, that which is limited excludes by definition whatever is not comprised within its own limits and must compensate for this exclusion by a reaffirmation or repetition of itself outside its own boundaries, which amounts to saying that the existence of other limited things is rigorously implied in the very definition of the limited. To claim that a limitation, for example a form considered as such, is unique and incomparable of its kind, and that it excludes the existence of other analogous modalities, is to attribute to it the unicity of

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Existence itself; now no one can contest the fact that a form is always a limitation or that a Tradition is of necessity always a form—not, that goes without saying, in virtue of its internal Truth, which is of a universal and supra-formal order, but because of its mode of expression which, as such, cannot but be formal and therefore specific and limited. It can never be said too often that a form is always a modality of a category of formal, and therefore distinctive or multiple, manifestation, and is consequently but one modality among others that are equally possible, their supra-formal cause alone being unique. We will also repeat—for this is metaphysically of great importance—that a form, by the very fact that it is limited, necessarily leaves something outside itself, namely, that which its limits exclude; and this something, if it belongs to the same order, is necessarily analogous to the form under consideration, since the distinction between forms must needs be compensated by an indistinction or relative identity which prevents them from being absolutely distinct from each other, for that would entail the absurd idea of a plurality of unicities or Existences, each form representing a sort of divinity without any relationship with other forms.

As we have just seen, the exoteric claim to the exclusive possession of the truth comes up against the axiomatic objection that there is no such thing in existence as a unique fact, for the simple reason that it is strictly impossible that such a fact should exist, unicity alone being unique and no fact being unicity; this it is which is ignored by the ideology of the 'believers', which is fundamentally nothing but an intentional and interested confusion between the formal and the universal. The ideas which are affirmed in one traditional form (as, for example, the idea of the Word or of the Divine Unity) cannot fail to be affirmed, in one way or another, in all other traditional forms; similarly the means of grace or of spiritual realization at the disposal of one priestly order cannot but possess their equivalent elsewhere; and indeed, the more important and indispensable any particular means of grace may be, the more certain is it that it will be found in all the orthodox forms in a mode appropriate to the environment in question.

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The foregoing can be summed up in the following formula: pure and absolute Truth can only be found beyond all its possible expressions; these expressions, as such, cannot claim the attributes of this Truth; their relative remoteness from it is expressed by their differentiation and multiplicity, by which they are strictly limited.

6

The metaphysical impossibility of the exclusive possession of the truth by any doctrinal form whatsoever can also be expressed in the following manner, adopting a cosmological viewpoint which can be translated without difficulty into religious language. That God should have permitted the decay and consequent decline of certain civilizations after having granted them several thousand years of spiritual prosperity is in no way in contradiction with the 'nature' of God, if one may so express oneself. Likewise, that the whole of humanity should have entered into a relatively short period of obscurity after thousands of years of sane and balanced existence is again in conformity with God's 'manner of acting'. On the other hand, to suppose that God, while desiring the well-being of humanity, should have seen fit to leave the vast majority of men—including the most gifted—to stagnate for thousands of years, practically without hope, in the darkness of mortal ignorance, and that in wishing to save the human race He should have seen fit to choose a means so materially and psychologically ineffective as a new religion which, long before it could be brought to the notice of all mankind, had not only acquired an increasingly particularized and local character, but was even, by force of circumstances, partially corrupted in its original environment—to suppose that God could act in such a manner is highly presumptuous and flagrantly contradicts the 'nature' of God, the essence of which is Goodness and Mercy. This nature, as theology is far from being unaware, can be 'terrible' but not monstrous. Again, that God should have allowed human blindness to create heresies within traditional civilizations is in conformity

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with the Divine Laws which govern the whole of creation; but that God could have allowed a religion which was merely the invention of a man to conquer a part of humanity and to maintain itself for more than a thousand years in a quarter of the inhabited world, thus betraying the love, faith and hope of a multitude of sincere and fervent souls—this again is contrary to the Laws of the Divine Mercy, or in other words, to those of Universal Possibility.

The Redemption is an eternal act which cannot be situated either in time or space, and the sacrifice of Christ is a particular manifestation or realization of it on the human plane; men were able to benefit from the Redemption as well before the coming of Jesus Christ as after it, and outside the visible Church as well as within it.

If Christ had been the only manifestation of the Word, supposing such a uniqueness of manifestation to be possible, the effect of His birth would have been the instantaneous reduction of the universe to ashes.

7

We have seen above that everything that can be said concerning dogmas applies equally to means of grace, such as the sacraments. Thus, if it be true that the Eucharist is a means of grace of primordial importance, this is because it emanates from a universal Reality from which it draws all its own reality; but if this be so, the Eucharist, like all other corresponding means of grace in other traditional forms, cannot be unique, since a universal Reality cannot have one manifestation only to the exclusion of any others, for in that case it would not be universal. It is no use objecting that this rite concerns the whole of humanity on the ground that it must be taken to 'all nations' to use the Gospel expression; for the world in its normal state, at least, since the beginning of a certain cyclic period, is composed of several distinct humanities who are more or less ignorant of each other's existence, though in certain respects and under certain circumstances, the exact delimitation of these humanities

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may be a highly complex question owing to the intervention of certain exceptional cyclic conditions.*

Though it is true that some of the great Prophets or *Avatāras*, while being aware, in principle, of the universality of Tradition, have been impelled to deny certain traditional forms in a purely outward sense, it is necessary to consider, firstly, the immediate reason for this attitude, and secondly, its symbolic meaning, the latter being superimposed, so to speak, on the former. If Abraham, Moses and Christ denied the 'paganisms' with which they came into contact, the reason is that they were dealing with Traditions which had outlived their usefulness; surviving as mere forms without any true spiritual life and sometimes even serving as supports for sinister influences, the reason for their existence had disappeared. One who is 'chosen' and who is himself the living tabernacle of the Truth certainly has no cause to respect dead forms which have become unfitted to fulfil their original purpose. On the other hand, this negative attitude on the part of those who manifest the Divine Word is also symbolic, and it is that which gives to it its deepest and truest meaning; for while it clearly could not concern such kernels of esotericism as may have survived in the midst of civilizations that were outworn and had been emptied of their meaning, this same attitude is on the contrary fully justified when applied to a state of fact, that is to say to a degeneracy or 'paganism' which had become widespread. To give another analogous example: if Islam had in some measure to deny the monotheistic forms which preceded it, the immediate reason lay in the formal limitations of

* Certain passages from the New Testament indicate that for the Christian Tradition the 'world' is identified with the Roman Empire, which represented the providential sphere of expansion and life for Christian civilization. Thus St. Luke wrote—or rather the Holy Ghost made St. Luke write—that 'in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed' (*ἀπογράφειν πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην*, *ut describeretur universus orbis*), to which Dante made allusion in his treatise on the Monarchy when he spoke of the 'census of the human race' (*in illa singulari generis humani descriptione*). Elsewhere in the same treatise we find the following: 'By these words, we may clearly understand that universal jurisdiction over the world belonged to the Romans', and also: 'I therefore affirm that the Roman people . . . has acquired . . . dominion over all mortals.'

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those Traditions. It is for instance beyond doubt that Judaism was no longer capable of serving as a traditional basis for the peoples of the Near East, since the Judaic form had become too particularized to be suitable for expansion; as for Christianity, not only had it very soon become particularized in a similar way, under the influence of its Western environment and perhaps more especially of the Roman mind, but it had also given birth in Arabia and the adjacent countries to all manner of deviations which threatened to inundate the Near East, and even India, with a multitude of heresies which were far removed from primitive and orthodox Christianity. The Islamic Revelation, by virtue of the Divine authority inherent in every Revelation, clearly had the most indisputable right to reject the Christian dogmas, which, moreover, were all the more liable to give rise to deviations in that they were initiatory truths which had been popularized rather than genuinely adapted. On the other hand, the passages in the Qoran concerning Christians, Jews, Sabaeans and pagans have primarily a symbolic meaning which has no bearing on the orthodoxy of the Traditions, and their mention by name is simply a means of describing certain conditions affecting humanity in general. For instance, when it is stated in the Qoran that Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian but *hanīf* ('orthodox' in relation to the primordial Tradition), it is clear that the names 'Jew' and 'Christian' can only be intended to denote certain general spiritual attitudes of which the formal limitations of Judaism and Christianity are but particular manifestations or examples. In speaking of the 'formal limitations' of Judaism and Christianity we are not of course referring to Judaism and Christianity in themselves, their orthodoxy not being in dispute.

Returning to the question of the relative incompatibility between the different traditional forms and more particularly between certain of them, we may add that it is necessary that one form should to some extent misinterpret the others, since the reason for the existence of a Tradition, from one point of view at least, is to be found precisely in those things wherein it differs from other Traditions. Divine Providence has per-

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mitted no mingling of the revealed forms since the time when humanity became divided into different 'humanities' and moved away from the primordial Tradition, the only unique Tradition possible. For example, the Moslem misinterpretation of the Christian dogma of the Trinity is providential, since the doctrine contained in this dogma is essentially and exclusively esoteric and is not capable of being 'exotericized' in any way whatever; Islam had therefore to limit the expansion of this dogma, but this in no way prejudices the existence, within Islam, of the universal truth which is expressed by the dogma in question. On the other hand, it may be useful to point out here that the deification of Jesus and Mary, indirectly attributed to the Christians by the Qoran, gives rise to a 'Trinity' which this Book nowhere identifies with the Trinity of Christian doctrine but which is none the less based on certain realities: firstly, the idea of the 'Co-Redemptress', 'Mother of God', a non-exoteric doctrine which as such could find no place in the religious perspective of Islam; secondly, the Marianism which existed in practice and which from the Islamic point of view constituted a partial usurpation of the worship due to God; and lastly, the 'Mariolatry' of certain Oriental sects against which Islam was bound to react all the more violently in that it bore a close resemblance to Arab paganism. On the other hand, according to the Sufi Abd-el-Karīm el-Jīlī, the 'Trinity' mentioned in the Qoran is capable of an esoteric interpretation—the Gnostics in fact looked upon the Holy Ghost as the 'Divine Mother'—and it is accordingly only for the 'exteriorization' or alteration of this meaning, as the case may be, that orthodox Christians and the heretical worshippers of the Virgin are respectively reproached. From yet another viewpoint it may be said—and the very existence of the heretics in question proves it—that the Qoranic 'Trinity' corresponds fundamentally to what the Christian dogmas would have become through an inevitable fault of adaptation had they come to be adopted by the Arabs, for whom they were not intended. So far as the orthodox Christian interpretation of the dogma of the Trinity is concerned, its rejection by Islam is also motivated by considerations of a

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purely metaphysical kind. Christian theology understands by the 'Holy Ghost' not only a purely principal Reality, 'metacosmic' and Divine, but also the direct reflection of this Reality in the manifested, cosmic and created order; according to the theological definition, in fact, the Holy Ghost, apart from its principal or Divine signification, embraces also the 'summit' or luminous 'centre' of the whole creation, that is to say it embraces supra-formal manifestation, which, to use Hindu terms, is the direct and central reflection of the creative Principle, *Purusha*, in the cosmic Substance *Prakriti*. This reflection, which is the Divine Intelligence manifested or *Buddhi*—in Sufism *Er-Rūh* and *El-Aql*, and also the four Archangels who are analogous to the *Devas* and their *Shaktis* and represent so many aspects or functions of this Intelligence—is the Holy Ghost in so far as It illumines, inspires and sanctifies man. When theology identifies this reflection with God, it is right in the sense that *Buddhi* or *Er-Rūh*—the Metatron of the Qabbalah—'is' God in the essential or 'vertical' relationship, namely, in the sense that a reflection is 'essentially' identical with its cause. When on the other hand the same theology distinguishes the Archangels from God the Holy Ghost, and regards them solely as creatures, it is again right, since it then distinguishes the Holy Ghost reflected in creation from Its principal and Divine prototype. It is, however, inconsistent, and necessarily so, in failing to take into account the fact that the Archangels are 'aspects' or 'functions' of this 'central' or 'supreme' portion of the creation which is the Holy Ghost *qua* Paraclete. From a theological or religious point of view, it is not possible to admit, on the one hand, the difference between the Divine, principal, 'metacosmic' Holy Ghost and the manifested, cosmic, and therefore 'created' Holy Ghost, and on the other hand the identity of the latter with the Archangels. The religious point of view, in fact, can never combine two different perspectives in a single dogma and this accounts for the divergence between Christianity and Islam: for the latter, the Christian 'deification' of the cosmic Intellect constitutes an 'association' (*shirk*) of something created—though it be the formless, angelic, paradisiacal or paracletic manifesta-

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tion—with God. This question of the Holy Ghost apart, Islam would in no way oppose the idea that Divine Unity comprises a ternary aspect; what it rejects is solely the idea that God is exclusively and absolutely a Trinity, since from an Islamic point of view, this amounts to ascribing relativity to God, or to attributing to Him a relative aspect in an absolute sense.

When we say that a traditional form is made, if not for a particular race, at least for a human collectivity determined by certain particular conditions—conditions which may be of a highly complex nature, as in the case of the Islamic world—the fact that Christians are to be found among practically all peoples or any other similar argument cannot be raised as a valid objection. In order to appreciate the necessity for a traditional form, it is not relevant to know whether or not, within the collectivity for which this form was made, there exist some individuals or groups capable of adapting themselves to another form—this could not be disputed—but solely whether the whole collectivity could adapt itself to the form in question; for instance, for the purpose of putting the legitimacy of Islam in doubt, it is not sufficient merely to point out that there are some Arab Christians, since the only question to consider is what kind of a Christianity would emerge if it came to be professed by the whole Arab collectivity.

There should now be no difficulty in understanding that the Divinity manifests Its Personal aspect through each particular Revelation and Its supreme Impersonality through the diversity of the forms of Its Word.

8

It was pointed out earlier that in its normal state humanity is composed of several distinct 'worlds'. Certain people will doubtless object that Christ when speaking of the 'world' never suggested any such delimitation, and furthermore that He made no reference to the existence of an esotericism. To this it may be answered that He also never explained to the Jews how His words should be interpreted, notwithstanding the offence

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thereby caused to them. Moreover an esotericism is addressed precisely to those 'that have ears to hear' and who for that reason have no need of the explanations and 'proofs' which may be desired by those for whom esotericism is not intended. As for the teaching which Christ may have reserved for His disciples, or some of them, it did not have to be set forth explicitly in the Gospels, since it is contained therein in a synthetic and symbolic form, the only form admitted in sacred Scriptures. Furthermore, as a Divine Incarnation, Christ necessarily spoke from an absolute standpoint, by reason of a certain 'subjectivization' of the Absolute which takes place in the case of 'God-men', concerning which, however, we cannot speak at length here.* He therefore had no occasion to take account of contingencies outside the sphere of His mission, nor did He have to specify the existence of traditional worlds that were 'whole'—to use the Gospel term—lying outside the 'sick' world with which His message was concerned; nor was He called upon to explain that in naming Himself 'the Way, the Truth and the Life'† in an absolute or principial sense He was not thereby trying to limit the universal manifestation of the Word, but was on the contrary affirming His own essential identity with the

* René Guénon explains this 'subjectivization' in the following terms: 'The lives of certain beings, considered from the standpoint of individual appearances, contain occurrences which correspond with events taking place in the cosmic order and outwardly may be said to represent an image or a reproduction of the latter; but from an inward standpoint this relationship must be reversed, for, since these beings are really the *Mahā-Purusha*, the cosmic events are truly speaking modelled on their lives, or to be more exact, on the reality of which these lives are a direct expression, the cosmic events themselves being only a reflected expression of this reality. (*Études Traditionnelles*, March 1939.)

† In Sufism there is a saying that 'None may meet *Allāh* who has not first met the Prophet'; that is to say, none can attain God save by means of His Word, in whatever form the latter may be revealed; or again, in a more specifically initiatory sense: None can attain the Divine 'Self' except through the perfection of the human 'ego'. It is important to emphasize that when Christ says 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life', this is absolutely true of the Divine Word ('Christ'), and relatively true of its human manifestation ('Jesus'); an absolute truth cannot in fact be limited to a relative being. Jesus is God, but God is not Jesus; Christianity is Divine, but God is not Christian.

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Word, the cosmic manifestation of which He Himself was 'living' in 'subjective' mode. This shows the impossibility of such a being considering Himself from the ordinary point of view of relative existence, although this point of view is included in every human nature and must be affirmed incidentally; but this in no way concerns the specifically religious perspective.

To return to the questions we were considering earlier, it must be added that since the expansion of the West over the rest of the world, exoteric incomprehension has ceased to be a matter of indifference, since it may compromise the Christian religion itself in the eyes of those who begin to perceive that not everything outside this religion is dark paganism. Needless to say, there is no question of reproaching Christ's teaching with any omission, since He was speaking to His Church and not to the modern world, which, as such, owes its whole existence to its rupture with this Church and therefore to its infidelity towards Christ. However, the Gospels do in fact contain some allusions to the limits of the Christian mission and to the existence of traditional worlds which are not identifiable with paganism: 'They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick'; and again: 'For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (Matt. ix. 12, 13); and finally this verse, which clearly explains the nature of paganism: 'Therefore take no thought, saying: what shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles (pagans) seek' (Matt. vi. 31, 32).^{*} It is also possible to quote the following passages in a similar sense: 'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you that many shall come down from the East and West and shall sit down[†] with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven.

^{*} In fact, the ancient paganism, including that of the Arabs, was distinguished by its practical materialism, whereas it is impossible in good faith to make the same reproach against the Oriental Traditions which have maintained themselves up to our days.

[†] This example of Oriental symbolism, or of symbolism without further qualification, should be sufficient to show the prejudice of those who decry the Islamic Paradise.

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But the children of the kingdom (Israel, the Church) shall be cast out into outer darkness, (Matt. viii. 10-12), and : 'For he that is not against us is on our part' (Mark ix. 40).

We have stated that Christ, in His capacity as a Divine Incarnation and in conformity with the universal essence of His teaching, always spoke from an absolute standpoint, that is to say, He symbolically identified certain facts with the principles which they translate, without ever placing Himself at the point of view of those for whom the facts presented an interest in themselves.* Such an attitude may be illustrated in the following way: would anyone speaking of the sun seriously contend that the placing of the definite article before the word 'sun' was tantamount to denying the existence of other suns in space? What makes it possible to speak of the sun, without specifying that it refers to one sun among others, is precisely the fact that for our world the sun we know is truly '*the* sun', and it is solely in this capacity, and not in so far as it is one sun among others, that it reflects the Divine Unicity. The sufficient reason for a Divine Incarnation is the aspect of unicity which it derives from That which it incarnates, and not the factual aspect which it necessarily derives from manifestation.†

* In the language of Christ, the destruction of Jerusalem is symbolically identified with the Last Judgement, which is very characteristic of the God-Man's synthetic and, so to speak, 'essential' or 'absolute' manner of viewing things. The same remark applies with regard to his prophecies concerning the descent of the Holy Ghost: they embrace simultaneously—but not unintelligibly—all the modes of Paracletic manifestation, among others, therefore, the manifestation of the Prophet Mohammed, who was none other than the 'personification' of the Paraclete or the cyclic manifestation of the latter; moreover, the Qoran, like the appearance of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, is called a 'descent' (*tanzīl*). It may be added that if the second coming of Christ at the end of our cycle will have a universal significance for men, in the sense that it will concern the entire human race and not merely 'a humanity' in the ordinary traditional meaning of the word—the Paraclete itself, in its great apparition, had to manifest this universality by anticipation, at least in relation to the Christian world, and it is for that reason that the cyclic manifestation of the Paraclete, or its 'personification' in Mohammed, had to appear outside Christianity in order to shatter a certain 'particularist' limitation.

† Christ expressed this by saying that 'God only is good'. Inasmuch as the term 'good' implies every possible positive meaning, and therefore every one

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9

In the final analysis the relationship between exotericism and esotericism is equivalent to the relationship between 'form' and 'spirit' which is discoverable in all expressions and symbols; this relationship must clearly also exist within esotericism itself, and it may be said that only the spiritual authority places itself at the level of naked and integral Truth. The 'spirit', that is to say the supra-formal content of the form, which, for its part, corresponds to the 'letter', always displays a tendency to breach its formal limitations, thereby putting itself in apparent contradiction with them. It is for this reason that one may consider every traditional readaptation, and therefore every Revelation, as fulfilling the function of an esotericism in relation to the preceding traditional form; Christianity, for example, is esoteric relatively to the Judaic form, and Islam relatively to the Judaic and Christian forms, though this is, of course, only valid when regarded from the special point of view which we are here considering and would be quite false if understood literally. Moreover, in so far as Islam is distinguished by its form from the

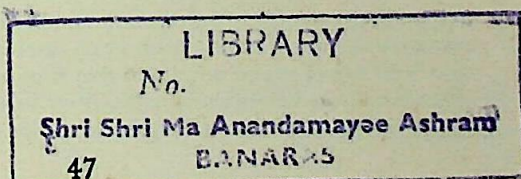
of the Divine Qualities, the saying may also be taken to mean that 'God alone is unique', which takes us to the doctrinal affirmation of Islam: 'There is no divinity (or reality) if it is not the (one) Divinity (or Reality).' To anyone who would contest the legitimacy of this interpretation of the Scriptures, we will answer with Meister Eckhardt that 'all truth is taught by the Holy Ghost; it is true that there is a literal meaning which the author had in mind, but since God is the Author of Holy Scripture, every true meaning is at the same time a literal meaning; for all that is true comes from the Truth itself, is contained in It, derives from It and is willed by It.' We may also quote a passage from Dante relating to the same subject: 'The Scriptures can be understood and ought to be expounded according to four senses. The first is called the literal. . . . The fourth is called the anagogical, that is to say which surpasses the senses (*souvasenso*); this occurs when one expounds spiritually a Scripture which, though true in the literal sense, also signifies the higher things belonging to the eternal glory, as one may see in the Psalm of the Prophet where it is said that when the people of Israel departed out of Egypt, Judaea was made holy and free. Although this was clearly true according to the letter, the spiritual meaning is no less true, namely, that when the soul departs from sin, it is rendered holy and free in its power.' (*Il Convito*, ii, I.)

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other two monotheistic Traditions, that is to say in so far as it is formally limited, these Traditions also possess an esoteric aspect relatively to it, and the same reversibility of relationship applies as between Christianity and Judaism. However, the relationship to which we referred first is a more direct one than the second, since it was Islam which, in the name of the spirit, shattered the 'forms' which preceded it, and Christianity which shattered the Judaic form, and not the other way about. To return, however, to the purely principial consideration of the relationship between form and spirit, we cannot do better than quote, by way of example, the following passage from the *Treatise on Unity* (*Risālat el-Ahadiyah*) by Mohyiddin ibn Arabi, which clearly illustrates the esoteric function of 'shattering the form in the name of the spirit': 'Most initiates say that the knowledge of *Allāh* follows upon the extinction of existence (*fanā el wujūd*) and the extinction of this extinction (*fanā el-fanā*); but this opinion is entirely false. . . . Knowledge does not demand the extinction of existence (of the ego) or the extinction of this extinction; for things have no existence, and that which does not exist cannot cease to exist.' Now the fundamental ideas which Ibn Arabi rejects, moreover with a purely speculative or 'methodic' intention, are still accepted even by those who consider Ibn Arabi as the greatest of spiritual masters; and in an analogous manner all exoteric forms are 'transcended' or 'shattered', and therefore in a certain sense 'denied' by esotericism, which is nevertheless the first to recognize the perfect legitimacy of every form of Revelation, being indeed alone competent to recognize this legitimacy.

'The wind bloweth where it listeth', and because of its universality shatters 'forms', though it must needs clothe itself in a form while on the formal plane.

'If you would have the Kernel'—said Meister Eckhart—'you must break the shell.'



Chapter III

TRANSCENDENCE AND UNIVERSALITY OF ESOTERICISM

I

Before coming to the main subject of this chapter, it is necessary that certain points regarding the more outward modes of esotericism should first of all be disposed of, though we would gladly have left this contingent aspect of the question out of account in order to concentrate solely on the essential; but since certain contingencies are liable to give rise to disputes about principles, there is really no alternative but to pause and consider them, a task which we shall try to carry out as briefly as possible.

One of the first things that may cause difficulty is the fact that although esotericism is reserved, by definition and because of its very nature, for an intellectual *élite* necessarily restricted in numbers, one cannot help observing that initiatory organizations have at all times included in their ranks a relatively large number of members. This was the case for instance with the Pythagoreans and it is even more noticeable in the case of the initiatory orders which, despite their decadence, still exist today, such as the Moslem brotherhoods. Even where one finds a very exclusive initiatory organization, it is in nearly all cases a branch or nucleus of a very much larger brotherhood,* and

* For example, the Order of the Temple, owing to the nature of its activities, necessarily included many members whose initiatory qualification restricted them to the most elementary spiritual ends, those accessible to all men who are of sound mind and free from any psychic deformity; on the other hand, the brotherhood of the *Fede Santa*, a Third Order affiliated to the Templars, was of a very exclusive nature.

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does not constitute a complete brotherhood in itself, save for some exceptions which are always possible in particular circumstances. The explanation of this more or less 'popular' participation in what is most inward and hence most subtle in a Tradition is that esotericism, in order to exist in a given world, must be integrated with a particular modality of that world, and this will necessarily involve relatively numerous elements of society; this leads to a distinction, within the brotherhoods, between inner and outer circles, the members of the latter being scarcely aware of the real nature of the organization to which they belong in a certain degree, and which they regard simply as a form of the outward Tradition which alone is accessible to them. To return to the example of the Moslem brotherhoods, this is the explanation of the distinction made between those members who are merely characterized as *mutabārik* ('blessed' or 'initiated') and whose viewpoint hardly extends beyond the religious perspective, which they wish to live with intensity, and members of the *élite* who have attained the degree of *sālik* ('one who travels') and follow the way marked out by the initiatory Tradition; it is true that nowadays the number of genuine *sālikūn* is exceedingly small, whereas the *mutabārikūn* are far too numerous from the standpoint of the normal equilibrium of the brotherhoods and, by their manifold incomprehensions, contribute to the stifling of true spirituality. However that may be, the *mutabārikūn*, even when they are unable to understand the transcendent reality of the brotherhood which has received them, none the less derive, under normal conditions, a great benefit from the *bārakah* ('benediction' or 'spiritual influence') which surrounds and protects them according to the degree of their fervour; for it goes without saying that the radiation of grace within esotericism extends, by reason of the latter's very universality, through all the domains of the traditional civilization and is not halted by any formal limit, just as light, colourless in itself, is not halted by the colour of a transparent body.

All the same, this participation of the 'people', that is, of men representing the collective average, in the spirituality of

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the *élite* is not always to be explained solely by reasons of opportunity but also, and above all, by the law of polarity or compensation whereby 'extremes meet', and it is for this reason also that 'the voice of the people is the Voice of God' (*Vox populi, Vox Dei*); one might say that the people, in their capacity as passive and unconscious transmitters of the symbols, represent, as it were, the periphery or the passive or feminine reflection of the *élite*, the latter possessing and transmitting the symbols in an active and conscious way. This also explains the curious and apparently paradoxical affinity existing between the people and the *élite*: for instance, Taoism is at the same time esoteric and popular, whereas Confucianism is exoteric and more or less aristocratic and 'literate'; or to take another example, the Sufi brotherhoods have always possessed a popular aspect which is to some extent correlative to their esoteric aspect. The reason for this lies in the fact that the people, in addition to their peripheral aspect, possess also an aspect of totality, and the latter corresponds analogically to the centre. It can be said that the intellectual functions of the people are the crafts and folklore, the first representing 'method' or 'realization' and the second 'doctrine'; in this way the people reflect, passively and collectively, the essential function of the *élite*, namely the transmission of the properly intellectual aspect of the Tradition, a clothing for which is provided by symbolism in all its forms.

Another question which needs elucidating before we proceed any further concerns the idea of the universality of Tradition. This idea, being still of a more or less outward order, is clouded over by all sorts of historical and geographical contingencies, so much so that certain people freely doubt its reality; for instance, we have heard it disputed somewhere that Sufism admits this idea, and it has been argued that Mohyiddin ibn Arabi denied it when he wrote that Islam was the pivot of the other Traditions. The truth is, however, that every traditional form is superior to the others in a particular respect, and it is this characteristic which in fact indicates the sufficient reason for the existence of that form. Anyone who speaks in the name of his Tradition always has this characteristic in mind; what mat-

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ters, where the recognition of other traditional forms is concerned, is the fact—exoterically inconceivable—of such recognition, not its mode or degree. Moreover this point of view finds its prototype in the Qoran itself; in one place the Qoran says that all the Prophets are equal, while elsewhere it declares that some are superior to others. This means, according to the commentary of Ibn Arabī, that each Prophet is superior to the others by reason of a particularity which is peculiar to him, and therefore in a certain respect. Ibn Arabi belonged to the Islamic civilization and owed his spiritual realization to the Islamic *bārakah* and the Masters of Sufism, in a word, to the Islamic form of Tradition; he must needs, therefore, have placed himself at this point of view, that is to say at the standpoint of the relationship wherein the Islamic form is superior by comparison with other forms. If this relative superiority did not exist those Hindus who became Moslems through the centuries could have had no positive reason for acting as they did. The fact that Islam constitutes the last form of the *Sanātana-Dharma* in this *Mahā-yuga*, to use Hindu terms, implies that this form possesses a certain contingent superiority over preceding forms; similarly, the fact that Hinduism is the most ancient of the living traditional forms implies that it possesses a certain superiority or 'centrality' with respect to later forms. There is not, of course, any contradiction here, since the standpoint is different in the two cases.

In the same way, the fact that St. Bernard preached the Crusades and that he was probably ignorant of the real nature of Islam is in no wise inconsistent with his esoteric knowledge. The question is not whether St. Bernard did or did not understand Islam but whether he would have understood it had he enjoyed direct and regular contacts with this form of Revelation, in the same manner as it was understood by the Templar *élite* who found themselves in a position favourable to such understanding. In the case of Dante also, this question is unimportant, apart from the fact that there is good reason to believe that he placed Mahomet in Hell for purely outward reasons and that this *Maometto* was in all probability quite a different person from the Prophet of Islam; for a man's spiritu-

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ality cannot be held to depend on knowledge of a historical or geographical kind or on any other 'scientific' information of a similar order. It can therefore be said that the universalism of initiates is virtual as to its possible applications, and that it only becomes effective when circumstances permit or impose a determined application. In other words, it is only after contact with another civilization that this universalism is actualized, though there is, of course, no strict law governing this matter and the factors which will determine the acceptance by such and such an initiate of any particular alien form may vary greatly according to the case; it is clearly impossible to define exactly what constitutes a 'contact' with an alien form, a contact, that is to say, which will be sufficient to bring about the understanding of such a form.*

* An analogous remark may be made regarding the holy men known to Sufism by the name of *Afrād* ('isolated' singular *Fard*): these men, who by definition have always been very few, are distinguished by the fact of possessing an effective initiation spontaneously, without having had to be initiated ritually. Such men, having obtained knowledge without studies or spiritual exercises of any sort, may well be ignorant of those things of which personally they have no need. Not having been initiated, they have no occasion to know what initiation means in the technical sense; thus they speak in the manner of men of the 'golden age'—an epoch when initiation was not yet necessary—rather than in the manner of spiritual instructors of the 'iron age'; moreover, since they have not followed a path of realization, they cannot assume the role of spiritual Master.

Similarly, if Shri Ramakrishna was unable to foresee the deviation of some of his disciples, it was because his ignorance of the modern Western mentality made it impossible for him to interpret certain visions otherwise than in a normally Hindu sense. It must be added, however, that this deviation, which is of a doctrinal order and of modern Western inspiration, does not annul the influence of grace issuing from Shri Ramakrishna, but is merely superimposed upon it in the manner of a superfluous decoration, non-existent spiritually; in other words, the fact that the saint's *bhakti* has been travestied in a pseudo-*jñāna* in the philosophico-religious or European style, in no way prevents the spiritual influence from being what it is. Similarly if Shri Ramakrishna intended to bestow freely the radiation of his *bhakti*, consistently with certain particular conditions connected with the end of the cycle, such an intention is independent of the forms which the zeal of some of his disciples came to take; moreover, this willingness to give generously of himself allies the saint of Dakshineswar to the 'spiritual family' of Christ, so much so that everything which can be said of the particular nature of the spiritual radiation of Christ may also be applied to the radiation of the *Paramahansa*: *Et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt.*

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2

We must now answer more explicitly the question as to the truths that exotericism must of necessity ignore, without, however, expressly denying them.¹ Perhaps the most important among the conceptions which are inaccessible to exotericism is, in certain respects at least, that of the gradation of universal Reality: Reality affirms itself by degrees, but without ceasing to be 'one', the inferior degrees of this 'affirmation' being absorbed, by metaphysical integration or synthesis, into the superior degrees. This is the doctrine of the cosmic illusion: the world is not only more or less 'imperfect' or 'ephemeral', but cannot even be said to 'be' at all in relation to absolute Reality, since the reality of the world would limit God's Reality and He alone 'is'. Furthermore Being Itself, which is none other than the 'Personal God', is in its turn surpassed by the 'Impersonal' or 'Supra-Personal Divinity', 'Non-Being', of which the 'Personal God' or Being is simply the first determination from which flow all the secondary determinations which make up cosmic Existence. Exotericism cannot, however, admit either this unreality of the world or the exclusive reality of the Divine Principle, or, above all, the transcendence of 'Non-Being' relatively to Being or God. In other words the exoteric point of view cannot comprehend the transcendence of the supreme Divine Impersonality of which God is the personal Affirmation;* such truths are of too high an order, and therefore too subtle and too complex from the point of view of simple rational understanding, to be accessible to the majority or formulated in a dogmatic manner. Another idea that exotericism does not admit is that of the immanence in all beings of the Intellect, which Meister Eckhart defined as 'uncreated and uncreatable';† clearly this

¹ See note on p. 78

* On the subject of 'Non-Being', an expression borrowed from the Taoist doctrine, see *Les états multiples de l'être* by René Guénon.

† It is common knowledge that certain passages from Eckhart's works which went beyond the theological point of view and were therefore outside the competence of the religious authority as such, were condemned by this

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truth cannot be integrated in the exoteric perspective any more than the idea of metaphysical realization, by which man becomes 'conscious' of that which has never really ceased to be, namely his essential identity with the Divine Principle which alone is real.* Exotericism on the other hand, is obliged to maintain the distinction between Lord and servant, leaving aside the fact that the profanely-minded affect to see in the

authority. If this verdict was nevertheless justifiable on grounds of expediency, it was certainly not so in its form, and by a curious repercussion John XXII, who had issued the Bull, was in his turn obliged to retract an opinion which he had preached and saw his authority shaken. Eckhart only retracted in a purely principal manner, through simple obedience and before even knowing the Papal decision; consequently his disciples were not disturbed by his retraction any more than they were by the Bull itself. We may add that one of them, Blessed Henry Suso, had a vision after Eckhart's death of the 'Blessed Master, deified in God in a superabundant magnificence'.

* The Sufi Yahya Mu'adh Er-Rāzī said that 'Paradise is the prison of the initiate as the world is the prison of the believer'; in other words, universal manifestation (*el-khalq*, or the Hindu *samsāra*), including its beatific Centre (*Es-Samawāt* or the *Brahma Loka*) is metaphysically an (apparent) limitation (of the non-manifested Reality: *Allāh*, *Brahma*), just as formal manifestation is a limitation (of the supra-formal, but still manifested, Reality: *Es-Samawāt*, *Brahma-Loka*) from an individual or religious point of view. However, such a formulation is exceptional; esotericism is in general 'implicit' and not 'explicit', finding its normal expression through the medium of the Scriptural symbols; thus, to take Sufism as an example, the word 'Paradise' adopted from the Qoranic terminology, is employed to denote states, such as the 'Paradise of the Essence' (*Jannat Edh-Dhāt*), which are situated beyond every cosmic reality and, for still stronger reasons, beyond every individual determination. If, therefore, a Sufi refers to 'Paradise' as the prison of the initiate, he is merely considering it from the ordinary, and cosmic point of view, which is that of the religious perspective, as he is obliged to do when he wishes to show the essential difference between the 'individual' and 'universal' or 'cosmic' and 'metacosmic' ways. It must therefore never be forgotten that the 'Kingdom of Heaven' of the Gospels and the 'Paradise' (*Jannah*) of the Qoran, do not only represent conditioned states, but also, and simultaneously, aspects of the Unconditioned State of which they are only the most direct cosmic reflections.

To return to the quotation from Yahya Mu'adh Er-Rāzī, we find an analogous idea expressed in the condemned passages from Meister Eckhart: 'Those who seek neither fortune, nor honours, nor benefits, nor inward devotion, nor saintliness, nor recompense, nor the Kingdom of Heaven, but have renounced all, even that which is their own, it is in these men that God is glorified.' This sentence, like that of Er-Rāzī, expresses the metaphysical negation of the individuality in the realization of the Supreme Identity.

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metaphysical idea of essential identity nothing but 'pantheism', which incidentally relieves them of any effort at comprehension.

This idea of 'pantheism' warrants a further short digression. In reality, pantheism consists in the admission of a continuity between the Infinite and the finite; but this continuity can only be conceived if it is first admitted that there is a substantial identity between the ontological Principle—which is in question in all forms of Theism—and the manifested order, a conception which presupposes a substantial, and therefore false, idea of Being, or the confusing of the essential identity of manifestation and Being with a substantial identity. Pantheism is this and nothing else; it seems, however, that some minds are incurably obstinate when faced with so simple a truth, unless it be that they are impelled by some passion or interest not to let go of such a convenient polemical instrument as the term 'pantheism', the use of which allows them to cast a general suspicion over certain doctrines which are considered embarrassing, without involving them in the trouble of examining them in themselves.* However, by ceaselessly affirming the 'existence' of God, those who believe it their duty to protect this existence against an imaginary pantheism prove that their conception is not even truly theistic, since it does not attain to Being but stops short at Existence, or more precisely at the substantial aspect of Existence, for the purely essential aspect refers Existence once more to Being. Even if the idea of God were no more than a conception of the universal Substance (*materia prima*), and the ontological Principle were therefore in no way involved, the

* Pantheism is the great resource of all those who want to brush aside esotericism with the minimum of inconvenience and who, for example, imagine that they can understand a given metaphysical or initiatory text because they know the grammar of the language in which it is written. What can one say of all those treatises which attempt to make the traditional doctrines a subject of profane study, as if there were no knowledge which was not accessible to anybody and everybody and as if it were sufficient to have been to school to be able to understand the most venerable wisdom better than the sages understood it themselves? For it is assumed by 'specialists' and 'critics' that there is nothing which is beyond their powers; such an attitude resembles that of children who, having found books intended for adults, judge them according to their ignorance, caprice or laziness.

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reproach of pantheism would still be unjustified, inasmuch as the *materia prima* always remains transcendent and virginal in relation to its productions. If God is conceived as primordial Unity, that is, as pure Essence, nothing could be substantially identical with Him; to qualify essential identity as pantheistic is both to deny the relativity of things and to attribute an autonomous reality to them in relation to Being or Existence, as if there could be two realities essentially distinct or two Unities or Unicities. The fatal consequence of such reasoning is pure and simple materialism, for once manifestation is no longer conceived as being essentially identical with its Principle, the logical admission of this Principle becomes solely a question of credulity, and if this sentimental reason collapses there is no longer any reason for admitting the existence of anything beyond manifestation, and more particularly beyond sensory manifestation.

3

Let us now return to the subject of the Divine Impersonality to which reference has already been made. Strictly speaking, this 'Impersonality' is more properly a 'Non-Personality', that is to say it is neither personal nor impersonal but supra-personal. In any case the term 'Impersonality' should not be understood in a privative sense, for, on the contrary, it refers here to an absolute Plenitude and Illimitability which is determined by nothing, not even by Itself. It is Personality which represents a sort of privation, or rather 'privative determination' relatively to Impersonality, and not the reverse. Needless to say, the term 'Personality', as it is used here, must be taken to refer only to the 'personal God' or 'Divine Ego', if one may use such an expression, and not to the 'Self', which is the transcendent principle of the individual ego and which may be called the 'Personality' relatively to the 'individuality' without any limitation being thereby implied. The distinction we are concerned with here is therefore between the 'Divine Person', principal Prototype of the individuality on the one hand and the Divine

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'Impersonality', which is so to speak the infinite Essence of this 'Person', on the other. This distinction between the 'Divine Person', who manifests a particular Will in a given 'world', symbolically unique, and the Divine 'impersonal' Reality which, on the contrary, manifests the essential and universal Divine Will through the forms of the particular or 'personal' Divine Will—and sometimes in apparent contradiction with the latter—this distinction we repeat, is absolutely fundamental in esotericism, not only because it is an important feature of metaphysical doctrine, but also, secondarily, because it explains the antinomy which appears to exist between the exoteric and esoteric spheres. We will try to explain this idea more clearly with the help of a well-known, but little understood, Scriptural example, relating to the life of the Prophet-King Solomon. The Bible reproaches Solomon for having loved 'strange' women and for having built temples to their divinities, which he went so far as to recognize; it says elsewhere that Solomon 'slept with his fathers'—a formula it uses also when speaking of David—thus indicating that, like them, he passed into a beatific posthumous state. Whatever the appearances may be there is, in reality, nothing contradictory about this, for the Sacred Books are not 'literature', and traditional exegesis always starts from the principle that in a sacred text every word possesses a meaning, quite apart from any question of a plurality of superimposed meanings. In the case of Solomon, therefore, we must distinguish between his esoteric knowledge, which may be referred to what we have called, for lack of a better term, the 'Divine Impersonality', and his exoteric orthodoxy, i.e. his conformity to the Will of the 'Divine Person'; it was not by virtue of opposition to this Will, but by reason of the aforementioned knowledge that the great builder of the Temple of *Yahweh* recognized the Divinity in other revealed forms, even though these were in a state of decadence. Consequently it was not the decadence or paganism of these forms that he accepted, but their primitive purity which was still recognizable in their symbolism, so that he may be said to have accepted them by piercing the veil of their decadence; moreover, is not the insis-

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tence of the Book of Wisdom on the vanity of idolatry a sort of contradiction of the exoteric interpretation of Solomon's attitude given in the Book of Kings? However that may be, Solomon, while being in himself superior to particular forms, nevertheless had to suffer the consequences of the contradictions to which his universalism gave rise on the formal plane. The Bible essentially affirms one form, that of Judaic Monotheism, and does so in the particularly 'formal' mode of historical symbolism, which, by definition, is concerned with events; it must, therefore, blame Solomon's attitude in so far as it was in contradiction with the 'Personal' manifestation of Divinity, yet at the same time it infers that the person of the Sage himself was unaffected by the infraction.* Solomon's 'irregular' attitude brought political schism to his kingdom; this is the only sanction recorded by the Scriptures, and it would be a quite disproportionate punishment if the Prophet-King had really practised 'polytheism', which, in fact, he never did. The sanction mentioned above took effect exactly on the level at which the irregularity had occurred, and not above it; moreover Solomon's memory has continued to be venerated not only in Judaism, particularly in the Qabbalah, but also in Islam, Sharaite as well as Sufic; as for Christianity, one need only recall the commentaries which have been inspired by the Song of Songs, for example those of St. Gregory of Nyssa, Theodoret and St. Bernard. It remains to be said that if the antinomy between the two principal 'dimensions' of Tradition arises in the Bible itself,

* Thus, the Qoran affirms that 'Solomon was not impious' (or 'heretical': *mā kafara Suleymān*) (*sūrat El-Baqarah*, 102) and exalts him in these words: 'How excellent a servant was Solomon! Verily, he was always (in spirit) turned towards *Allāh* (the commentators add: Glorifying Him and praising Him without ceasing)' (*sūrat Sad*, 30). Nevertheless, the Qoran alludes to an ordeal imposed on Solomon by God, then to a prayer of repentance uttered by the Prophet-King and lastly to the Divine hearing of this prayer (*ibid.*, 34-6). The commentary on this enigmatic passage accords symbolically with the narrative in the Book of Kings, since it records that one of Solomon's wives, without his knowledge and in his own palace, adored an idol; Solomon lost his seal and, with it, his kingdom for several days, then found the seal again and recovered his kingdom; he then prayed to God to pardon him and obtained from Him a greater and more marvellous power than he had before.

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notwithstanding that it is a Sacred Book, this is because the mode of expression of this Book, like the Judaic form itself, gives preponderance to the exoteric point of view, which could here almost be described as 'social', or even 'political', though not of course in the profane sense. In Christianity, on the other hand, the relationship is reversed, while in Islam, synthesis of the Judaic and Christian 'geniuses', the two traditional dimensions appear in a state of equilibrium; that is why the Qoran only considers Solomon (*Seyidnā Suleymān*) in his esoteric aspect and in the capacity of Prophet.* Lastly, let us quote a passage from the Bible in which *Yahweh* orders the prophet Nathan to repeat the following words to David: 'And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy

* The sacred book of Islam expresses the impeccability of the Prophets as follows: 'They do not take precedence over Him (*Allāh*) in their speech (they do not speak first) and they act according to His commandments' (*sūrat el-Anbiyah*, 27); this amounts to saying that the Prophets do not speak without inspiration nor act without the divine commandment. This impeccability is only compatible with the 'imperfect actions' (*dhunūb*) of the Prophets by virtue of the metaphysical truth of the two divine Realities, one 'personal' and the other 'impersonal', the respective manifestations of which may contradict each other on the level of facts, at least in the case of the great saints though never in the case of ordinary mortals. The word *dhanb*, though it also means 'sin' and particularly 'unintentional sin', primarily and originally means 'imperfection in action' or imperfection resulting from an action'; that is why the word *dhanb* is used when it refers to the Prophets and not the word *iḥm* which signifies exclusively 'sin' with emphasis on its intentional character. If one were to insist on seeing a contradiction between the impeccability of the Prophets and the extrinsic imperfection of some of their actions one would also have to admit an incompatibility between the perfection of Christ and his words regarding his human nature: 'Why call you me good? God only is good' These words also answer the question as to why David and Solomon did not foresee conflict with a particular degree of the universal Law: the answer being that the individual nature always retains certain 'blind spots' the presence of which enters into its very definition. It goes without saying that this necessary limitation of every individual substance in no way affects the spiritual reality to which this substance is joined in a quasi-accidental manner, since there is no common measure between the individual and the spiritual, the latter being synonymous with the divine.

Lastly we will quote the following words of the Caliph Ali, the representative *par excellence* of Islamic esotericism: 'To whomsoever narrates the story of David as the story tellers narrate it (that is, with an exoteric or profane interpretation), I will give one hundred and sixty lashes, and this will be the punishment of those who bear false witness against the Prophets.'

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seed after thee, which (Solomon) shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his Kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his Kingdom for ever. I will be his father and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him as I took it from Saul whom I put away before thee.' (2 Sam. vii. 12-15.)

An analogous example is that of David, whom the Qoran also recognizes as a Prophet and whom Christians recognize as one of the greatest saints of the Old Covenant. It is clear that a saint cannot commit the sins (note that we do not say 'accomplish the actions') with which David is reproached. What needs to be understood is that the 'transgression' which the Bible, in conformity with its 'legal' point of view, attributes to the saintly King, only appears as such because of the essentially moral, and therefore exoteric, perspective which predominates in this Sacred Book (which explains the attitude of St. Paul and of Christianity in general towards Judaism, the Christian point of view being eminently 'inward'); whereas the impeccability of the Prophets, as affirmed for example by the Qoran, corresponds on the contrary to a deeper reality than can be attained by the moral point of view. Esoterically, David's desire to marry Bathsheba could not be a transgression, since the quality of Prophet can only attach to men who are free from passions, whatever may be the appearances in certain cases. What must be discerned above all in the relationship between David and Bathsheba is an affinity or 'cosmic' and 'providential' complementarism, of which the fruit and justification was Solomon, he whom '*Yahweh* loved' (2 Sam. vii. 25). The coming of this second Prophet-King was a divine confirmation of and a benediction on the union between David and Bathsheba, and God does not authorize or recompense transgression. According to Mohyiddin ibn Arabi, Solomon represented for David more than a recompense: 'Solomon was the gift of *Allāh* to David, in conformity with the Divine Words: and we gave Solomon to David as a gift (Qoran, *sūrat Sad*, 30). Now one receives a gift

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through favour and not as a reward of merit; it is for this reason that Solomon is the overflowing grace, the clear proof and the mighty blow. (*Fusūs El-Hikam, Kalimah Suleymāniyah.*)

Let us now consider the story in so far as it concerns Uriah the Hittite; here no less, David's manner of acting should not be judged according to the moral point of view, since, quite apart from the fact that a heroic death with face turned towards the enemy is very far from prejudicial to the last ends of a warrior, and that when it occurs, as here, in a 'Holy War', such a death possesses an immediate sacrificial character, the motive behind this manner of acting could only be a prophetic intuition. Nevertheless, the choice of Bathsheba and the sending of Uriah to his death, although 'cosmologically' and 'providentially' justified, none the less clashed with the exoteric Law, and David, while benefiting, by Solomon's birth, from the intrinsic legitimacy of his action, had to bear the consequences of this clash; but the very fact that an echo of the clash appears in the Psalms, which is a Sacred Book because divinely inspired—its existence proving, moreover, that David was a Prophet—shows once again that David's actions, though having a negative aspect on an outward plane, nevertheless do not constitute 'sins' in themselves. One might even say that God inspired these actions with a view to the Revelation of the Psalms, of which the purpose was to record, in Divine and immortal song, not only the sufferings and glory of the soul in search of God, but also the sufferings and glory of the Messiah. David's manner of acting was clearly not in all respects contrary to the Divine Will, since God not only 'pardoned' David (to use the somewhat anthropomorphic biblical term), but even allowed him to keep Bathsheba, the cause and object of the 'sin'. Furthermore, not only did God not take Bathsheba away from David, but He even confirmed their union by the gift of Solomon; and if it is true, for David as well as for Solomon, that the outward or purely extrinsic irregularity of certain actions provoked a corresponding 'reaction', it is important to recognize that this reaction was strictly limited to the terrestrial domain. These two aspects, the one 'outward' or negative and the other 'inward' or positive, of the history of

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Uriah's wife, again find expression in two other facts: firstly, the death of her first-born, and, secondly, the life, greatness and glory of her second son, he whom '*Yahweh* loved'.

This digression appeared necessary in order to bring out more clearly the profoundly different natures of the exoteric and esoteric domains and to show that whenever there is incompatibility between them it can only spring from the first and never from the second, which is superior to forms and therefore beyond all oppositions. There is a Sufic formula which illustrates as clearly and concisely as possible the different viewpoints of the two great ways: 'The exoteric way: I and Thou. The esoteric way: I am Thou and Thou art I. Esoteric knowledge: neither I nor Thou, Him.'

Exotericism may be said to be founded on the 'creature-Creator' dualism to which it attributes an absolute reality, as though the Divine Reality, which is metaphysically unique, did not absorb or annul the relative reality of the creature, and hence any and every relative and apparently extra-divine reality. While it is true that esotericism also admits the distinction between the individual 'ego' and the universal or divine 'Self', it does so only in a provisional and 'methodic' manner, and not in an absolute sense; taking its point of departure at the level of this duality, which obviously corresponds to a relative reality, it ultimately passes beyond it metaphysically, which would be impossible from the exoteric point of view, the limitation of which consists precisely in its attributing an absolute reality to what is contingent. This brings us to what is really the definition of the exoteric perspective, namely an irreducible dualism and the exclusive pursuit of individual salvation—this dualism implying that God is considered solely under the aspect of His relationship with the created and not in his total and infinite Reality, in his Impersonality which annihilates all apparent reality other than Him.

It is not the actual fact of this dogmatic dualism which is blameworthy, since it corresponds exactly to the individual viewpoint at which religion places itself, but solely the inductions which imply the attribution of an absolute reality to what is

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relative. Metaphysically, human reality is reducible to the Divine Reality and in itself is only illusory; theologically, Divine Reality is in appearance reduced to human reality, in the sense that It does not surpass the latter in existential but only in causal quality.

4

The perspective of the esoteric doctrines shows up with particular clarity in their way of regarding what is commonly called 'evil'; it has often been said that they deny evil purely and simply, but such an interpretation is too rudimentary and expresses the perspective of the doctrines in question in a very imperfect manner. The difference between the religious and metaphysical conceptions of evil does not mean, moreover, that the one is false and the other true, but simply that the former is incomplete and individual whereas the latter is integral and universal; what the religious perspective represents as evil or the Devil only corresponds therefore to a partial view and is in no way the equivalent of the negative cosmic tendency which is envisaged by the metaphysical doctrines, and which Hindu doctrine designates by the term *tamas*; but if *tamas* is not the Devil, and more correctly corresponds to the 'Demiurge', in so far as it represents the cosmic tendency which 'solidifies' manifestation, drawing it downwards and away from its Principle and Origin, it is none the less true that the Devil is a form of *tamas*, the latter being considered in this case solely in its relations with the human soul. Man being a conscious individual, the cosmic tendency in question, when it comes in contact with him, necessarily takes on an individual and conscious aspect, a 'personal' aspect according to the current expression. Outside the human world this same tendency may assume entirely 'impersonal' and 'neutral' aspects, as, for example, when it is manifested as physical weight or material density, or in the guise of a hideous beast or of a common and heavy metal such as lead. The religious perspective, by definition, only occupies itself with man and considers cosmology solely in relation to him, so

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that there is no reason to reproach religion for considering *tamas* under a personified aspect, that is to say under the aspect which actually touches the world of men. If therefore esotericism seems to deny evil, it is not because it ignores or refuses to recognize the nature of things as they are in reality; on the contrary, it completely penetrates their nature, and that is the reason why it is impossible for it to abstract from the cosmic reality one or other of its aspects or to consider one such aspect solely from the point of view of individual human interest. It is self-evident that the cosmic tendency of which the devil is the quasi-human personification is not 'evil', since it is this same tendency, for example, which condenses material bodies, and if it were to disappear—an absurd supposition—all bodies or physical and psychic compositions would instantaneously volatilize. Even the most sacred object therefore has need of this tendency in order to be enabled to exist materially, and no one would be so rash as to assert that the physical law which condenses the material mass of, say, the Host is a diabolical force or in any sense an 'evil'. It is precisely because of this 'neutral' character (independent of the distinction between 'good' and 'evil') of the 'demiurgic' tendency that the esoteric doctrines, which reduce everything to its essential reality, seem to deny what in human parlance bears the name of 'evil'.

It may nevertheless be asked what consequences such a 'non-moral'—we do not say 'immoral'—conception of 'evil' implies for the initiate; the reply to this is that in the consciousness of the initiate, and consequently in his life, 'sin' is replaced by 'dissipation', that is by everything which is opposed to spiritual 'concentration' or in other words to unity. Needless to say, the difference here is primarily one of principle and of method, and this difference does not affect all individuals in the same way; however, what morally is 'sin' is nearly always 'dissipation' from the initiatory point of view. This 'concentration'—or tendency towards unity (*tawhīd*)—becomes, in Islamic exotericism, faith in the Unity of God, and the greatest transgression is to associate other divinities with *Allāh*; for the initiate (the *faqir*), on the other hand, this transgression will have a universal bear-

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ing in the sense that every purely individual affirmation will be tainted with this aspect of false divinity, and if, from the religious point of view, the greatest merit lies in the sincere profession of Divine Unity, the *faqir* will realize this profession in a spiritual manner, giving to it a meaning which embraces all the orders of the universe, and this will be achieved precisely by the concentration of his whole being on the one Divine Reality. To make clearer this analogy between 'sin' and 'dissipation' we may take as an example the reading of a good book. From the exoteric point of view this will never be considered as a reprehensible act, but it may be considered incidentally so in esotericism in cases where it amounts to a dissipation, or when the dissipation entailed by the act outweighs its usefulness. Inversely, a thing which would nearly always be considered by religious morality as a 'temptation', and hence as a first step on the path to sin, may sometimes play the opposite part in esotericism, inasmuch as, far from being a dissipation, 'sinful' or otherwise, it may be a factor of concentration by virtue of the immediate intelligibility of its symbolism. There are even cases, in Tantrism for example and in certain cults of antiquity, where acts which in themselves would count as sins, not only according to a particular religious morality but also according to the legislation of the civilization in which they occur, serve as a support for intellection, a fact which presupposes a strong predominance of the contemplative element over the passionate; however, a religious morality is never made for the benefit of contemplatives only but for that of all men.

It will be understood that we are far from depreciating morality, which is a Divine institution, but the fact that it is so does not prevent its being limited. It must be stated once again that in the majority of cases, moral laws, when transposed outside their ordinary sphere, become symbols and consequently vehicles of knowledge; in fact, every virtue is the mark of a conformity with a 'Divine attitude' and therefore an indirect and quasi 'existential' mode of the knowledge of God, which amounts to saying that whereas a sensible object can be known by the eye, God can only be known by 'being'; to know God it

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is necessary to 'resemble' Him, that is to conform the 'microcosm' to the divine 'Metacosm'—and consequently to the 'macrocosm' also—as is expressly taught by the Hesychast doctrine. That having been said, it is necessary strongly to underline the fact that the 'amorality' of the spiritual position is rather a 'super-morality' than a 'non-morality'. Morality, in the widest sense of the term, is in its own order a reflection of true spirituality and must be integrated, together with partial truths—or partial errors—in the total being; in other words, just as the most holy man is never entirely liberated from action on this earth, since he has a body, so he is never entirely liberated from the distinction between 'good' and 'evil', since this distinction necessarily insinuates itself into every action.

Before considering the question of the actual existence of 'evil', we will add the following: the two great traditional 'dimensions'—exoterisicm and esotericism—can be, if not defined, at least described to some extent by associating with the former the terms 'morality, action, merit, grace', and with the latter the terms 'symbolism, concentration, knowledge, identity'; thus the passionate man will approach God through action supported by a moral code, while the contemplative, on the other hand, will become united with his Divine Essence through concentration supported by a symbolism, without this excluding the former attitude—that goes without saying—within the limits which are proper to it. Morality is a principle of action, therefore of merit, whereas symbolism is a support of contemplation and a means of intellection; merit, which is acquired by a mode of action, has for its goal the Grace of God, whereas the goal of intellection, in so far as the latter can be distinguished from its goal, is union or identity with that which we have never ceased to be in our existential and intellectual Essence; in other words, the supreme goal is the reintegration of man in the Divinity, of the contingent in the Absolute, of the finite in the Infinite. Morality as such obviously has no meaning outside the relatively very restricted domain of action and merit, and therefore in no way extends to such realities as symbolism, contemplation, intellection and identity through knowledge. As

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for 'moralism', which must not be confused with morality, this is merely the tendency to substitute the moral point of view for all other points of view; it has the result, in Christianity at least, of fostering a kind of prejudice or suspicion with regard to anything of an agreeable nature, as well as the erroneous notion that all pleasant things are only that and nothing more. It is forgotten that for the true contemplative the positive quality and hence the symbolic and spiritual value of such things will greatly outweigh any disadvantage which may arise from a temporary indulgence of human nature, for every positive quality is essentially—though not existentially—identified with a Divine quality or perfection which is its eternal and infinite prototype. If in the foregoing remarks there is some appearance of contradiction, this is due to the fact that we have considered morality first of all as it is in itself, that is to say as a matter of social or psychological expediency, and secondly as a symbolic element, therefore in the quality of a support for intellection; in the latter case, the opposition between morality and symbolism (or intellectuality) is obviously meaningless.

Now, as regards the 'problem' of the existence of 'evil' itself, the religious point of view only gives an indirect and somewhat evasive answer, declaring that the Divine Will is unfathomable, and that out of all evil good will ultimately come. This second proposition does not, however, explain evil, and as for the first, to say that God is unfathomable means that there is some appearance of contradiction in his 'ways' which we are unable to resolve. From an esoteric point of view the 'problem of evil' resolves itself into two questions: firstly, why do things created necessarily imply imperfection? and secondly, why do they exist? To the first of these questions the answer is that if there were no imperfection in Creation nothing would distinguish it from the Creator, or in other words, it would not be effect or manifestation, but Cause or Principle; the answer to the second question is that Creation (or Manifestation) is necessarily implied in the infinity of the Principle, in the sense that it is so to speak an aspect or consequence of this infinity. This amounts to saying that if the world did not exist the Infinite would not be

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the Infinite; to be what It is the Infinite must apparently and symbolically deny Itself, and this denial is achieved in universal Manifestation. The world cannot but exist, since it is a possible and therefore necessary aspect of the absolute necessity of Being; imperfection, no less, cannot but exist, since it is an aspect of the very existence of the world. The existence of the world is strictly implied in the infinity of the Divine Principle, and the existence of evil is similarly implied in the existence of the world. God is All-Goodness, and the world is His image; but since the image cannot, by definition, be That which it represents, the world must be limited relatively to the Divine Goodness, hence the imperfection in existence. Imperfections may therefore be likened to 'fissures' in the image of the Divine All-Perfection, and their origin is clearly not to be sought in this Perfection itself, but in the necessarily relative or secondary character of the image. Manifestation implies imperfection by definition, as the Infinite implies manifestation by definition. This triad 'Infinite, manifestation, imperfection' provides the formula which explains everything that the human mind may find 'problematical' in the vicissitudes of existence; those who with the eye of the Intellect are capable of viewing the metaphysical causes of all appearances will never find themselves brought to a standstill by insoluble contradictions, as necessarily happens to those limited to an exoteric perspective, which, by reason of its anthropomorphism, can never hope to grasp all the aspects of universal Reality.

5

Another example of the helplessness of the human mind when left to its own resources is the 'problem' of 'predestination'. This idea of predestination is simply an expression, in the language of human ignorance, of the Divine Knowledge which in its perfect simultaneity embraces all possibilities without any restriction. In other words, if God is omniscient, He knows 'future' events, or rather events which appear thus to beings limited by time; if God did not know these events, He would

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not be omniscient; from the moment that He knows them, they appear as 'predestined' relatively to the individual. The individual will is free in so far as it is real; if it were not in any degree or in any way free it would be deprived of all reality; and in fact, relatively to absolute Liberty, it has no reality, or more precisely it is totally non-existent. From the individual standpoint, however, which is the standpoint of human beings, the will is real in the measure in which those beings participate in the Divine Liberty, from which individual liberty derives all its reality by virtue of the causal relationship between the two; whence it follows that liberty, like all positive qualities, is Divine in itself and human in so far as it is not perfectly itself, in the same way that a reflection of the sun is identical with the sun, not as reflection, but as light, light being one and indivisible in its essence.

The metaphysical link between predestination and liberty might be illustrated by comparing the latter to a liquid which settles into all the convolutions of a mould, the latter representing predestination: in that case the movement of the liquid is equivalent to the free exercise of our will. If we cannot will anything other than what is predestined for us, this does not prevent our will being what it is, namely a relatively real participation in its universal prototype; it is precisely by means of this participation that we feel and live our will as being free.

The life of a man, and by extension the whole individual cycle of which that life and the human condition are only modalities, is in fact contained in the Divine Intellect as a complete whole, that is to say as a determined possibility which, being what it is, is not in any of its aspects other than itself, since a possibility is nothing else than an expression of the absolute necessity of Being; hence the unity or homogeneity of every possibility, which is accordingly something that cannot not be. To say that an individual cycle is included as a definitive formula in the Divine Intellect comes to the same thing as saying that a possibility is included in the Total Possibility, and it is this truth which furnishes the most decisive answer to the

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question of predestination. The individual will appears in this light as a process which realizes in successive mode the necessary inter-connection of the modalities of its initial possibility, which is thus symbolically described or recapitulated. It can also be said that since the possibility of a being is necessarily a possibility of manifestation, the cyclic process of that being is the sum of the aspects of its manifestation and therefore of its possibility, and that the being, through the exercise of its will, merely manifests in deferred mode its simultaneous cosmic manifestation; in other words the individual retraces in an analytic way his synthetic and primordial possibility which, for its part, occupies a necessary place in the hierarchy of possibilities, the necessity of each possibility, as we have seen, being based metaphysically on the absolute necessity of the Divine All-Possibility.

6

In order to grasp the universality of esotericism, which is the same thing as the universality of metaphysic, it is important above all to understand that the means or organ of metaphysical knowledge is itself of a universal order and not, like reason, of an individual order; consequently this means or organ, which is the Intellect, must be found in all orders of nature and not only in man as is the case with discursive thought. To answer the question as to how the Intellect is manifested in the 'peripheral' domains of nature we shall have to introduce ideas which may prove somewhat puzzling for those who are unaccustomed to metaphysical and cosmological speculation, although, in themselves, these ideas represent fundamental and obvious truths. It may be said therefore that to the extent to which a state of existence is removed from the 'central' state of the world to which it belongs—and the human state, like every other cosmologically analogous state, is central in relation to all 'peripheral' states, whether terrestrial or not, and therefore not only in relation to the animal, vegetable and mineral states but also to the angelic states, whence the adoration of Adam by the

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angels mentioned in the Qoran—to the extent to which a state is 'peripheral', the Intellect becomes identified with its content, in the sense that a plant is even less able than an animal to know its own wishes or progress in knowledge, but is passively tied to and even identified with such knowledge as is imposed on it by its nature and which essentially determines its form. In other words, the form of a 'peripheral' being, whether it be animal, vegetable or mineral, reveals all that that being knows, and is, as it were, itself identified with this knowledge; it can be said, therefore, that the form of such a being gives a true indication of its contemplative state or 'dream'. That which differentiates beings, in the measure in which they occupy states that are progressively more 'passive' or 'unconscious', is their mode of knowledge or their 'intelligence'. Humanly speaking it would be absurd to say that gold is more 'intelligent' than copper or that lead has little 'intelligence', but metaphysically there is nothing ridiculous in such an assertion: gold represents a 'solar' state of knowledge, and it is this, moreover, which permits of its association with spiritual influences and its being thus invested with an eminently sacred character. Needless to say the object of knowledge or of intelligence is always and by definition the Divine Principle and cannot be anything else, since It is metaphysically the only Reality; but this 'object' or 'content' can vary in form in conformity with the indefinite diversity of the modes and degrees of Intelligence reflected in creatures. Furthermore it must be pointed out that the manifested or created world has a double root, Existence and Intelligence, to which heat and light correspond analogically in igneous bodies; all beings and all things reveal these two aspects of relative reality. As already stated, that which differentiates beings and things is their mode and degree of intelligence; on the other hand, that which unites them is their existence, which is the same for all. But the relationship is reversed if we turn from the cosmic and 'horizontal' continuity of the elements of the manifested world and consider their 'vertical' connection with their transcendent Principle; that which unites the being, and more particularly the 'realized' being, to the Divine Principle, is the Intellect;

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that which separates the world—or any microcosm—from the Principle, is Existence. In the case of man, intelligence is 'inward' and existence 'outward'; and since the latter does not in itself admit of differentiation, men form one single species, whereas differences of 'caste' and spirituality are most marked. In the case of a being belonging to a 'peripheral' domain, on the other hand, it is existence which is 'inward', since its lack of differentiation does not appear in the foreground, while intelligence or the mode of intellection is outward, differentiation appearing in the forms themselves, whence the endless diversity of species in all these domains. One might also say that man is normally, by primordial definition, pure knowledge and the mineral pure existence: the diamond, which stands at the summit of the mineral realm, integrates intelligence as such in its existence or manifestation, therefore passively or 'unconsciously', whence its hardness, transparency and luminosity; the spiritually great man, who stands at the summit of the human species, integrates the whole of existence in his knowledge, therefore in an active and 'conscious' manner, whence his universality.

7

The universality of metaphysical knowledge is necessarily reflected in the spiritual means proper to esotericism; this accounts for the fundamental difference between the metaphysical way and the religious way, the latter being based upon an individual point of view and the former upon a perspective that is universal. In order to define more clearly the differences between the methods which correspond respectively to religious belief and metaphysical knowledge, one can describe the first of these ways, the religious way, as being 'passive', not in itself, but relatively to the end to be achieved; the metaphysical or initiatory way, on the contrary, can be called 'active' by virtue of its conscious and voluntary participation in the Divine Intellect and in the Divine Activity. The importance accorded by mysticism to psychic contingencies such as 'aridity' and 'con-

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solutions' clearly shows that in the religious or mystic way* grace is passively awaited—that is to say without there being the possibility of activating it by an intellectual and voluntary act—and individual activity consists essentially in earning 'merit' which is accumulated with a view to grace; in the initiatory way the reverse in a sense is true, inasmuch as grace is actively brought into play by means of the contemplative intelligence which identifies itself more or less directly with that which it contemplates. Neither the virtues, which in the Sufic treatises are the subject of detailed commentaries—and to which the *Yoga-Shāstras* attach no less importance—nor the ascetic disciplines which are associated with them in a secondary degree, are practised with a view to the acquisition of merit in the interest of the individual as such; on the contrary they serve, at least in an indirect way, as a means of enabling the being to pass beyond all individuality and consequently beyond every interested viewpoint; they provide a means of removing the obstacles which are opposed to the principally permanent radiation of grace, which is no other than the radiation of the being's divine Essence. On the other hand the mortification practised by the mystic possesses by definition a penitential character which that of the initiate cannot have; the latter purifies himself in the first place by the intellectual vision of the Divine, or by the 'fire of Knowledge' as the Hindus say, and mortification, which in his case will nearly always have a purely privative character, will serve, as has been said above, as a means of

* This word 'mystic', which originally had the same meaning as the word 'initiatory' and which still has this meaning, in principle, in the Eastern Church, is now only used in the theological language of the Latin Church to denote a properly religious, or individual, realization; it is for this reason that we prefer only to use the word to denote a realization which remains within the limits of exotericism. Since such a realization seems to exist, in principle at least, only within Christianity, and incidentally perhaps in later Judaism also, the words mystic and mysticism only signify for us a sort of spiritual individualism, thus a purely occidental mode of spirituality. It remains true that many authors use these words in a very general sense and simply to indicate, without wishing to specify any particular modes whose existence they are moreover unaware of, an inward, personal and direct contact between man and God.

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removing the impediments which darken the brilliance of the Divine Ray in the soul. Before this Ray, which is transcendent Knowledge, the world and its attractions gradually withdraw, like snow melting in the sun, and no austerity can surpass in excellence the Paracletic and sanctifying miracle of pure intellectual Knowledge,* which dissolves all the bonds of ignorance. This perspective is also found in primitive Christianity; Christian virtue was not, as under the old Law, merit earned with the intention of justification before God, but, on the contrary, a response to Divine grace already present through faith, an attitude in conformity with the presence of this grace, or a means of not losing it; as a result, the purity of the Christian life was much nearer to Adam's state of innocence before the Fall than to his penitence after his expulsion from Paradise. However, the difference between the initiatory and mystic ways is without doubt most clearly illustrated by the fact that in the initiatory way the state of spiritual 'submersion' (the Hindu *samādhi* and the Sufic *hāl*) can and must be obtained through knowledge and by a voluntary act, which of course presupposes the attainment of a degree (*maqām*) which makes a conscious communication with the Divine Essence possible, whereas it is the impossibility of voluntarily achieving a 'mystic state' which enters essentially into the definition of this state. There is here a difference of principle, though not an absolute difference, since everything we have said about either of the two ways also finds its place, analogically and in an appropriate manner, in the other. It is important, however, to know that the difference of principle exists and that it would be useless to attempt to deny it.

It follows from all that has been said above that in the initia-

* An *Upanishad* says that 'man, even though he has committed every transgression, will traverse them all in the vessel of Knowledge'. In the same sense Solomon said: 'Wisdom guarded to the end the first formed father of the world, that was created alone; and delivered him out of his own transgression, and gave him strength to get dominion over all things.' (Wisdom, x. 2.) In the same connection we also remember having heard an Arab Dervish say; 'It is not I who have left the world, it is the world which has left me' (by virtue of my Knowledge).

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tory way, merit, that is to say good works and penances, is replaced by intellectual concentration—absent from mysticism—on the absolute Reality which is man's Divine Essence and of which, by means of this concentration, he must become conscious to the point of complete identification. This certainly does not mean that works and sacrifices have no place in the life of the initiate, but rather that he attaches a different significance to them than does the mystic, in the sense that, for the initiate, every act tends to affirm or realize Unity either directly or indirectly. The Pauline opposition between 'Faith' and the 'Law' has, from the initiatory point of view, no other meaning than the opposition between contemplative concentration and merit in the moral sense; if there is anything which by its excellence is able to eclipse all human works and make them appear in all their poverty and impotence, it can only be a participation of a more or less direct nature in the Divine Infinity, or in other words, a miraculous reintegration of the human in the Divine.

8

The exoteric denial of the presence, whether virtual or actualized, of the uncreated Intellect in the created being, finds its most usual expression in the erroneous affirmation that no supernatural knowledge is possible apart from Revelation. But it is quite arbitrary to maintain that on this earth we have no immediate knowledge of God, and in fact that it is impossible for us to have such knowledge. This provides one more example of the opportunism which, on the one hand, denies the reality of the Intellect, and, on the other hand, denies to those who enjoy the possession of it the right to know what it causes them to know. The reasons behind this denial are, firstly, that direct participation in what may be called the 'Paracletic faculty' is not accessible to everybody, at least in practice, and secondly, that the doctrine of the presence of the uncreated Intellect in the creature would be prejudicial to the faith of the ordinary person, since it seems to run counter to the perspective of merit.

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What the religious point of view cannot admit, in Islam no less than in Christianity and Judaism, is the quasi 'natural' existence of a 'supernatural faculty', one which Christian dogma however admits with regard to Christ. It is apparently forgotten that the distinction between the 'supernatural' and the 'natural' is not absolute—except in the sense of being 'relatively absolute'—and that the 'supernatural' can also be called 'natural' in so far as it acts in accordance with certain laws. Inversely, the 'natural' is not without a 'supernatural' aspect in so far as it manifests the Divine Reality. Failing this, Nature would amount to pure nothingness. On the other hand, to maintain that the 'supernatural' Knowledge of God, that is to say the 'beatific vision' in the 'beyond', is an unobscured knowledge of the Divine Essence which is enjoyed by the individual soul, amounts to saying that absolute Knowledge can be achieved by a relative being as such, whereas, in reality, this Knowledge, being absolute, is none other than the Absolute in so far as it knows Itself; and if the Intellect, 'supernaturally' present in man, can make man participate in this Knowledge that the Divinity has of Itself, it is because of certain Laws which are, so to speak, 'freely' obeyed by the 'supernatural' by virtue of its very possibilities. Again, if the 'supernatural' differs in an eminent degree from the 'natural', it is nevertheless true that this difference no longer exists from another and more universal standpoint, that is to say in so far as the 'supernatural' itself also obeys—and is the first to obey—immutable Laws.

Knowledge is essentially holy (how else could Dante have spoken of the 'venerable authority of the Philosopher'?) with a holiness that is truly 'Paracletic': 'For to know thee is perfect righteousness,' says the Book of Wisdom (xv. 3), 'Yea, to know thy power is the root of immortality.' This sentence is of the greatest doctrinal significance, being one of the clearest and most explicit formulations that can be found of the idea of realization by Knowledge, or in other words of the intellectual way which leads to this 'Paracletic' sanctity. In other sentences of equal excellence this same Book of Solomon enunciates the qualities of pure intellectuality, essence of all spirituality; the

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passage which follows, in addition to the marvellous metaphysical and initiatory precision of its expression, brings out in a remarkable manner the universal unity of Truth, and this is achieved by the very form of the language, which recalls partly the Scriptures of India and partly those of Taoism: 'For in her (Wisdom) is an understanding spirit, holy, one only, manifold, subtil, lively, clear, undefiled, plain, not subject to hurt, loving the thing that is good, quick, which cannot be letted, ready to do good, kind to man, steadfast, sure, free from care, having all power, overseeing all things, and going through all understanding, pure and most subtil spirits. For wisdom is more moving than any motion: she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness. For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness. And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new: and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God, and prophets. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars: being compared with the light, she is found before it. For after this cometh night: but vice shall not prevail against wisdom. Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily; and sweetly doth she order all things.' (Wisd. of Sol. vii. 22-30; viii. 1.)

In conclusion a word must be said to forestall a rather common objection. Certain people readily regard transcendent intelligence which is aware of itself as 'pride', as if the fact that there are fools who believe themselves to be intelligent ought to prevent the wise from knowing what they know; pride, 'intellectual' or otherwise, is only possible in the case of the ignorant who are unaware of their own nothingness, just as humility, at least in the purely psychological sense of the term, is without meaning except for those who believe themselves to be something they are not. Those who wish to explain everything that is beyond them as 'pride', which to their way of thinking is the

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counterpart of 'pantheism', manifestly ignore the fact that if God has created such souls in order to be 'known' and 'realized' by them and in them, man has no part in the matter and can do nothing to alter it; Wisdom exists because it corresponds to a possibility, that of the human manifestation of the Divine Science.

'For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. . . . After the light cometh night: but vice shall not prevail against wisdom.'

NOTE

(1) [See p. 53] We may quote here some explanations given by a Moslem esotericist which will give an idea, not only of the relationship between exotericism and esotericism in Islam, but of what this relationship should normally be in every Tradition taking a religious form: 'Formalism, which is established for the 'average man', allows man to achieve universality. . . . It is in fact the 'average man' who is the object of the *shari'ah* or sacred law of Islam. . . . The idea of the 'average man' establishes a sort of neutrality around each person which guarantees every individuality while obliging everyone to work for all. . . . Islam, as a religion, is the way of unity and totality. Its fundamental dogma is called *Et-Tawhid*, that is to say unity or the action of uniting. As a universal religion, it admits of gradations, but each of these gradations is truly Islam in the sense that each and every aspect of Islam reveals the same principles. Its formulas are extremely simple, but the number of its forms is incalculable. The greater the number of these forms, the more perfect is the law. One is a Moslem when one follows one's destiny, that is to say one's *raison d'être*. . . . The *ex cathedra* utterance of the *mufiti* must be clear and comprehensible to all, even to an illiterate negro. He has no right to make any pronouncement on anything other than the commonplaces of practical life, and in fact never does so, since he is able to avoid questions which do not lie within his competence. It is the clear delimitation, known to all, between Sufic and Sharaite questions which allows Islam to be both esoteric and exoteric without contradicting itself. That is why there are never serious conflicts between science and faith among those Moslems who understand their religion. The formula of '*Et-Tawhid*' or Monotheism is a Sharaite

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commonplace. The import that a man gives to this formula is his personal affair, since it depends upon his Sufism. Every deduction that one can make from this formula is more or less valid, provided always that it does not destroy the literal meaning; for in that case one destroys the unity of Islam, that is to say its universality, its faculty of adapting and fitting itself to all mentalities, circumstances and epochs. Formalism is indispensable; it is not a superstition but a universal language. Since universality is the principle and the reason for the existence of Islam, and since language is the means of communication between beings endowed with reason, it follows that exoteric formulas are as important in the religious organism as the arteries in the animal body. . . . Life is not divisible; what makes it appear so is that it is capable of gradation. The more the life of the ego identifies itself with the life of the non-ego, the more intensely one lives. The transfusion of the ego into the non-ego is made by means of a 'gift that is more or less ritual, conscious or voluntary. It will be easily understood that the art of giving is the principal secret of the Great Work.' (Abdal-Hadi: *L'universalité en l'Islam* in *Le Voile d'Isis*, January 1934).

Chapter IV

CONCERNING FORMS IN ART

I

It may seem surprising that we should introduce a subject which not only appears to have little or no connection with anything that has gone before, but also in itself seems to be of secondary importance; in fact, however, this question of forms in art is by no means a negligible one and is closely connected with the general questions dealt with in this book.

First of all, however, there is a matter of terminology which calls for a few words of explanation: in speaking of 'forms in art' and not just 'forms', our purpose is to make it clear that we are not dealing with 'abstract' forms, but, on the contrary, with things that are 'sensible' by definition; if, on the other hand, we avoid speaking of 'artistic forms', it is because the epithet 'artistic' carries with it, in present-day language, a notion of 'luxury' and therefore of 'superfluity', and this corresponds to something diametrically opposed to what we have in mind. The expression 'forms in art' is really a pleonasm, inasmuch as it is not possible, traditionally speaking, to dissociate form from art, the latter being simply the principle of manifestation of the former; however, we have been obliged to use this pleonasm for the reasons just given.

If the importance of forms is to be understood, it is necessary to appreciate the fact that it is the sensible form which, symbolically, corresponds most directly to the Intellect, by reason of the inverse analogy connecting the principal and manifested

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orders.* In consequence of this analogy the highest realities are most clearly manifested in their remotest reflections, namely, in the sensible or 'material' order, and herein lies the deepest meaning of the proverb 'extremes meet'; to which one might add that it is for this same reason that Revelation descended not only into the souls of the Prophets, but also into their bodies, which presupposed their physical perfection.† Sensible forms therefore correspond with exactness to intellections, and it is for this reason that traditional art has rules which apply the cosmic laws and universal principles to the domain of forms, and which, beneath their more general outward aspect, reveal the 'style' of the civilization under consideration, this 'style' in its turn rendering explicit the form of intellectuality of that civilization. When art ceases to be traditional and becomes human, individual, and therefore arbitrary, that is infallibly the sign—and secondarily the cause—of an intellectual decline, a weakening, which, in the sight of those who know how to 'discriminate between the spirits' and who look upon things with an unprejudiced eye, is expressed by the more or less incoherent and spiritually insignificant, we would go even as far as to say unintelligible character of the forms.‡ In order to forestall any

* 'Art', said St. Thomas Aquinas, 'is associated with knowledge.' As for the metaphysical theory of inverse analogy, we would refer the reader to the doctrinal works of René Guénon, especially to *L'homme et son devenir selon le Vedānta* (Man and his Becoming according to the Vedānta, Luzac, 1946).

† René Guénon (*Les deux nuits*—The Two Nights, in *Études Traditionnelles*, Paris, Chacornac, April and May, 1939) in speaking of the *laylat el-qadr*, night of the 'descent' (*tanẓīl*) of the Qoran, points out that 'this night, according to Mohyiddin ibn Arabi's commentary, is identified with the actual body of the Prophet. What is particularly important to note is the fact that the "revelation" is received, not in the mind, but in the body of the being who is commissioned to express the Principle: "And the Word was made flesh" says the Gospel ("flesh" and not "mind") and this is but another way of expressing, under the form proper to the Christian Tradition, the reality which is represented by the *laylat el-qadr* in the Islamic Tradition.' This truth is closely bound up with the relationship mentioned as existing between forms and intellections.

‡ We are referring here to the decadence of certain branches of religious art during the Gothic period, especially in its latter part, and to Western art as a whole from the Renaissance onward: Christian art (architecture, sculpture, painting, liturgical goldsmithery, etc.), which formerly was sacred,

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possible objection, we would stress the fact that in intellectually healthy civilizations—the Christian civilization of the Middle Ages for instance—spirituality often affirms itself by a marked indifference to forms, and sometimes even reveals a tendency to turn away from them, as is shown by the example of St. Bernard when he condemned images in monasteries, which, it must be said, in no wise signifies the acceptance of ugliness and barbarism, any more than poverty implies the possession of things that are mean in themselves. But in a world where traditional art is dead, where consequently form itself is invaded by everything which is contrary to spirituality and where nearly every formal expression is corrupted at its very roots, the traditional regularity of forms takes on a very special spiritual importance which it could not have possessed at the beginning, since the absence of the spirit in forms was then inconceivable.

What has been said concerning the intellectual quality of sensible forms must not make us overlook the fact that the further one goes back to the origins of a given Tradition, the less those forms appear in a state of full development. The pseudo-form, that is to say an arbitrary form, is always excluded, as already stated, but form as such can also be virtually absent, at least in certain more or less peripheral domains. On

symbolical, spiritual, had to give way before the invasion of neo-antique and naturalistic, individualistic and sentimental art; this art, which contained absolutely nothing 'miraculous'—no matter what those who believe in the 'Greek miracle' may care to think—is quite unfitted for the transmission of intellectual intuitions and no longer even answers to collective psychic aspirations; it is thus as far removed as can be from intellectual contemplation and takes into consideration feelings only; on the other hand, feeling lowers itself in proportion as it fulfils the needs of the masses, until it finishes up in a sickly and pathetic vulgarity. It is strange that no one has understood to what a degree this barbarism of forms, which reached a zenith of empty and miserable exhibitionism in the period of Louis XV, contributed—and still contributes—to driving many souls (and by no means the worst) away from the Church; they feel literally choked in surroundings which do not allow their intelligence room to breathe. Let us note in passing that the historical connection between the new St. Peter's Basilica in Rome—of the Renaissance period, therefore anti-spiritual and rhetorical, 'human' if so preferred—and the origin of the Reformation are unfortunately very far from fortuitous.

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the other hand, the nearer one draws to the end of the traditional cycle under consideration, the greater the importance attaching to 'formalism', even from the so-called 'artistic' point of view, since the forms have by then become almost indispensable channels for the actualization of the spiritual deposit of the Tradition.* What should never be forgotten is the fact that the absence of the formal element is not equivalent to the presence of the unformed, and vice-versa; the unformed and the barbarous will never attain the majestic beauty of the void, whatever may be believed by those who have an interest in passing off a deficiency for a superiority.† This law of compensation, by

* This point is one that is ignored by certain pseudo-Hindu movements, whether of Indian origin or not, which move away from the sacred forms of Hinduism while believing themselves to represent its purest essence; in reality, it is useless to confer a spiritual means on a man, without having first of all forged in him a mentality which will be in harmony with this means, and that quite independently of the obligation of a personal attachment to an initiatory line; a spiritual realization is inconceivable outside the appropriate psychic 'climate', that is to say, one that is in conformity with the traditional surroundings of the spiritual means in question. We may perhaps be allowed to add a remark here which seems to take us rather outside our subject, though some readers, at least, will understand its appropriateness: an objection might be raised to what we have just been saying on the grounds that Shri Chaitanya bestowed initiation not only on Hindus but on Moslems as well; this objection, however, is pointless in the present case, for what Shri Chaitanya, who was one of the greatest spiritual Masters of India, transmitted first and foremost, was a current of grace resulting from the intense radiation of his own holiness; this radiation had the virtue of in some degree erasing or drowning formal differences, which is all the more admissible in that he was 'bhaktic' by nature. Besides, the fact that Shri Chaitanya could accomplish miracles in no wise implies that another *guru*, even if he were of the same initiatory lineage and therefore a legitimate successor of Chaitanya, could do the same; from another point of view which, though less important, is by no means negligible, one must also take into consideration the psychic and other affinities which may exist between Hindu and Moslem Indians, especially in the case of contemplatives, so that formal divergences can *a priori* be greatly attenuated in certain cases.

† The claim has sometimes been put forward that Christianity, on the ground that it stands above forms, cannot be identified with any particular civilization; it is indeed understandable that some people would like to find consolation for the loss of Christian civilization, including its art, but the opinion we have just quoted is none the less inexcusable. The recent new ecclesiastical canon concerning the laws of sacred art really has only a negative bearing, in the sense that it maintains a minimum of tradition simply

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virtue of which certain relationships become gradually inverted during the course of a traditional cycle, can be applied in all spheres: for instance, we may quote the following saying (*hadith*) of the Prophet Mohammed: 'In the beginning of Islam, he who omits a tenth of the Law is damned; but in the latter days, he who shall accomplish a tenth thereof will be saved.'

The analogical relationship between intellections and material forms explains how it became possible for esotericism to be grafted on to the exercise of the crafts and especially architectural art; the cathedrals which the Christian initiates left behind them offer the most explicit as well as the most dazzling proof of the spiritual exaltation of the Middle Ages.* This brings us to a most important aspect of the question now before us, namely, the action of esotericism on exotericism through the medium of sensible forms, the production of which is precisely the prerogative of craft initiation. Through these forms, which act as vehicles of the integral traditional doctrine, and which thanks to their symbolism translate this doctrine into a language that is both immediate and universal, esotericism infuses an intellectual quality into the properly religious part of the tradition, thereby establishing a balance the absence of which would finally bring about the dissolution of the whole civilization, as has happened in the Christian world. The abandoning of sacred art deprived esotericism of its most direct means of action; the outward tradition insisted more and more on its own peculiari-

in order to avoid seeing forms become so imaginative that the identification of their subjects is no longer possible; in other words, all that can be expected from this canon is that the faithful may be saved from mistaking a church steeple for a factory-chimney, and vice-versa. Apart from that, the aforesaid canon sanctions all the errors of the past when it declares that religious art must 'speak the language of its period', without even pausing to put the question of just what 'a period' means, and what rights it possesses, given that it does possess any; such a principle, in the name of which men have gone as far as to proclaim that 'modern ecclesiastical art is searching for a new style', implicitly contains another misunderstanding and a fresh repudiation of Christian art.

* When standing before a cathedral, a person really feels he is placed at the centre of the world; standing before a church of the Renaissance, Baroque or Rococo periods, he merely feels himself to be in Europe.

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ties, that is to say, its limitations, until finally, by want of that current of universality which, through the language of forms, had quickened and stabilized the religious civilization, reactions in a contrary sense were brought about; that is to say, the formal limitations, instead of being compensated and thereby stabilized by means of the supra-formal 'interferences' of esotericism, gave rise, through their 'opacity' or 'massiveness', to negations which might be qualified as 'infra-formal', resulting as they did from an individual arbitrariness which, far from being a form of the truth, was merely a formless chaos of opinions and fancies.

To return to our initial idea, it may be added that the 'Beauty' of God corresponds to a deeper reality than His 'Goodness', no matter how paradoxical this may appear at first sight. One has only to recall the metaphysical law in virtue of which the analogy between the principal and manifested orders is reversed, in the sense that what is principally 'great' will be 'small' in the manifested order and that which is 'inward' in the Principle will appear as 'outward' in manifestation, and vice versa. It is because of this inverse analogy that in man beauty is outward and goodness inward—at least in the usual sense of these words—contrary to what obtains in the principal order where Goodness is itself an expression of Beauty.

2

It has often been noticed that Oriental peoples, including those reputed to be the most artistic, show themselves for the most part entirely lacking in aesthetical discernment with regard to whatever comes to them from the West. All the ugliness born of a world more and more devoid of spirituality spreads over the East with unbelievable facility, not only under the influence of politico-economic factors, which would not be so surprising, but also by the free consent of those who, by all appearances, had created a world of beauty, that is a civilization, in which every expression, including the most modest, bore the imprint of the same genius. Since the very beginning of Western infiltration, it has been astonishing to see the most per-

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fect works of art set side by side with the worst trivialities of industrial production, and these disconcerting contradictions have taken place not only in the realm of 'art products', but in nearly every sphere, setting aside the fact that in a normal civilization, everything accomplished by man is related to the domain of art, in some respects at least. The answer to this paradox is very simple, however, and we have already outlined it in the preceding pages: it resides in the fact that forms, even the most unimportant, are the work of human hands in a secondary manner only; they originate first and foremost from the same supra-human source from which all tradition originates, which is another way of saying that the artist who lives in a traditional world devoid of 'rifts', works under the discipline or the inspiration of a genius which surpasses him; fundamentally he is but the instrument of this genius, if only from the fact of his craftsman's qualification.* Consequently, individual taste

* 'A thing is not only what it is for the senses, but also what it represents. Natural or artificial objects are not . . . arbitrary "symbols" of such or such a different or superior reality; but they are . . . the effective manifestation of that reality: the eagle or the lion, for example, is not so much the symbol or the image of the Sun as it is the Sun under one of its manifestations (the essential form being more important than the nature in which it manifests itself); in the same way, every house is the world in effigy and every altar is situated at the centre of the earth . . .' (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: 'The Primitive Mentality' in *Études Traditionnelles*, Paris, Chacornac, August-September-October, 1939). It is solely and exclusively traditional art—in the widest sense of the word, implying all that is of an externally formal order, and therefore *a fortiori* everything which belongs in some way or other to the ritual domain—it is only this art, transmitted with tradition and by tradition, which can guarantee the adequate analogical correspondence between the divine and the cosmic orders on the one hand, and the human or 'artistic' order on the other. As a result, the traditional artist does not limit himself simply to imitating Nature, but to 'imitating Nature in her manner of operation' (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sum. Theol.* I, qu. 117, a. 1) and it goes without saying that the artist cannot, with his own individual means, improvise such a 'cosmological' operation. It is by the entirely adequate conformity of the artist to this 'manner of operation', a conformity which is subordinated to the rules of tradition, that the masterpiece is created; in other words, this conformity essentially presupposes a knowledge, which may be either personal, direct and active, or inherited, indirect and passive, the latter case being that of those artisans who, unconscious as individuals of the metaphysical content of the forms they have learned to create, know not how to resist the corrosive influence of the modern West.

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plays only a relatively subordinate part in the production of the forms of such an art, and this taste will be reduced to nothing as soon as the individual finds himself face to face with a form which is foreign to the spirit of his own Tradition; that is what happens in the case of a people unfamiliar with Western civilization when they encounter the forms imported from the West. However, for this to happen, it is necessary that the people accepting such confusion should no longer be fully conscious of their own spiritual genius, or in other terms, that they should no longer be capable of understanding the forms with which they are still surrounded and in which they live; it is in fact a proof that the people in question are already suffering from a certain decadence. Because of this fact, they are led to accept modern ugliness all the more easily because it may answer to certain inferior possibilities that those people are already spontaneously seeking to realize, no matter how, and it may well be quite subconsciously; therefore, the unreasoning readiness with which only too many Orientals (possibly even the great majority) accept things which are utterly incompatible with the spirit of their Tradition is best explained by the fascination exercised over an ordinary person by something corresponding to an as yet unexhausted possibility, this possibility being, in the present case, simply that of arbitrariness or want of principle. However that may be, and without wishing to attach too much importance to this explanation of what appears to be the complete lack of taste shown by Orientals, there is one fact which is absolutely certain, namely that very many Orientals themselves no longer understand the sense of the forms they inherited from their ancestors, together with their whole Tradition. All that has just been said applies of course first and foremost and *a fortiori* to the nations of the West themselves who, after having created—we will not say 'invented'—a perfect traditional art, proceeded to disown it in favour of the residues of the individualistic and empty art of the Graeco-Romans, which has finally led to the artistic chaos of the modern world. We know very well that there are some who will not at any price admit the unintelligibility or the ugliness of the modern world, and who

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readily employ the word 'aesthetic', with a derogatory nuance similar to that attaching to the words 'picturesque' and 'romantic', in order to discredit in advance the importance of forms, so that they may find themselves more at ease in the enclosed system of their own barbarism. Such an attitude has nothing surprising in it when it concerns avowed modernists, but it is worse than illogical, not to say rather despicable, coming from those who claim to belong to the Christian civilization; for to reduce the spontaneous and normal language of Christian art—a language the beauty of which can hardly be questioned—to a worldly matter of 'taste'—as if medieval art could have been the product of mere caprice—amounts to admitting that the signs stamped by the genius of Christianity on all its direct and indirect expressions were only a contingency unrelated to that genius and devoid of serious importance, or even due to a mental inferiority; for 'only the spirit matters'—so say certain ignorant people imbued with hypocritical, iconoclastic, blasphemous and impotent puritanism, who pronounce the word 'spirit' all the more readily because they are the last to know what it really stands for.

In order to understand the causes of the decadence of art in the West, one must take into account the fact that there is in the European mentality a certain dangerous 'idealism' which is not without relevance to that decadence, nor yet to the decay of Western civilization as a whole. This 'idealism' has found its fullest, one might say its most 'intelligent' expression in certain forms of Gothic art, those in which a kind of 'dynamism' is predominant, which seems to aim at taking away the heaviness from stone. As for Byzantine and Romanesque art, as well as that other side of Gothic art wherein a 'static' power has been preserved, it might be said that it is an essentially intellectual art, therefore 'realistic'. The 'flamboyant' Gothic art, no matter how 'passionate' it became, was nevertheless still a traditional art except in the case of sculpture and painting which were already well on the way to decadence; to be more exact, it was the 'swan-song' of Gothic art. From the time of the Renaissance, which represents a sort of 'posthumous revenge' on the part of

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classical antiquity, European 'idealism' flowed into the exhumed sarcophagi of the Graeco-Roman civilization. By this act of suicide, idealism placed itself at the service of an individualism in which it thought to have rediscovered its own genius, only to end up, after a number of intermediate stages, in the most vulgar and wildest affirmations of that individualism. This was really a double suicide: firstly the forsaking of medieval or Christian art, and secondly the adoption of Graeco-Roman forms which intoxicated the Christian world with the poison of their decadence. But it is necessary here to consider a possible objection: was not the art of the first Christians in fact Roman art? The answer is that the real beginnings of Christian art are to be found in the symbols inscribed in the catacombs, and not in the forms that the early Christians, themselves in part belonging to the Roman civilization, temporarily borrowed in a purely outward manner from the 'classical' decadence. Christianity was indeed called upon to replace this decadence by an art springing spontaneously from an original spiritual genius, and if in fact certain Roman influences have always persisted in Christian art, this only applies to more or less superficial details.

It has just been stated that European 'idealism' allied itself to individualism and ended by identifying itself with the crudest expressions of the latter. As for those things that the West finds 'crude' in other civilizations, they are nearly always only the more or less superficial aspects of a 'realism' that scorns delusive and hypocritical veils. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that 'idealism' is not bad in itself, inasmuch as it finds its place in the minds of heroes, always inclined towards 'sublimation'; what is bad, and at the same time specifically Western, is the intrusion of this mentality into every sphere, including those in which it has no place. It is this distorted 'idealism', all the more fragile and dangerous because it is distorted, that Islam, with its desire for equilibrium and stability—in other words 'realism'—wished to avoid at all costs, having taken, moreover, into consideration the restricted possibilities of the present cyclic period, already far removed from its origin;

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herein lies the reason for that 'earthly' aspect with which Christians are wont to reproach the Islamic civilization.

3

In order to give an idea of the principles of traditional art, we will point out a few of the most general and elementary ones: first of all, the work executed must conform to the use to which it will be put, and it must translate that conformity; if there be an added symbolism, it must conform to the symbolism inherent in the object; there must be no conflict between the essential and the accessory, but a hierarchical harmony, which will moreover spring from the purity of the symbolism; the treatment of the material used must be in conformity with the nature of that material in the same way that the material itself must be in conformity with the use of the object; lastly, the object must not give an illusion of being other than what it really is, for such an illusion always gives a disagreeable impression of uselessness, and when this illusion is the goal of the finished work, as it is in the case of all 'classicist' art, it is the mark of a uselessness which is only too apparent. The great innovations of naturalistic art can be reduced in fact to so many violations of the principles of normal art: firstly, as far as sculpture is concerned, violation of the inert material used, whether it be stone, metal or wood, and secondly, in the case of painting, violation of the plane surface. In the first example, the inert material is treated as if it were endowed with life, whereas it is essentially static and only allows, because of this fact, the representation either of motionless bodies or of essential or 'schematic' phases of movement, but not that of arbitrary, accidental or almost instantaneous movements; in the second example, that of painting, the plane surface is treated as if it had three dimensions, both by means of foreshortening and by the use of shadows.

It will be appreciated that rules such as these are not dictated by merely 'aesthetic' reasons and that they represent, on the contrary, applications of cosmic and divine laws; beauty will flow from them as a necessary result. As regards beauty in

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naturalistic art, it does not reside in the work as such, but solely in the object which it copies, whereas in symbolic and traditional art it is the work in itself which is beautiful, whether it be 'abstract' or whether it borrows beauty in a greater or lesser degree from a natural model. It would be difficult to find a better illustration of this distinction than that afforded by a comparison between so-called 'classical' Greek art and Egyptian art: the beauty of the latter does not, in fact, lie simply and solely in the object represented, but resides simultaneously and *a fortiori* in the work as such, that is to say in the 'inward reality' which the work makes manifest. The fact that naturalistic art has sometimes succeeded in expressing nobility of feeling or vigorous intelligence is not in question and may be explained by cosmological reasons which could not but exist; but that has no connection with art as such, and no individual value could ever make up for the falsification of the latter.

The majority of moderns who claim to understand art are convinced that Byzantine or Romanesque art is in no way superior to modern art, and that a Byzantine or Romanesque Virgin resembles Mary no more than do her naturalistic images, in fact rather the contrary. The answer is, however, quite simple: the Byzantine Virgin—which traditionally goes back to Saint Luke and the Angels—is infinitely closer to the 'truth' of Mary than a naturalistic image, which of necessity is always that of another woman. Only one of two things is possible: either the artist presents an absolutely correct portrait of the Virgin from a physical point of view, in which case it will be necessary for the artist to have seen the Virgin, a condition which obviously cannot be fulfilled—setting aside the fact that all naturalistic painting is an abuse—or else the artist will present a perfectly adequate symbol of the Virgin, but in this case physical resemblance, without being absolutely excluded, is no longer at all in question. It is this second solution—the only one that makes sense—which is realized in icons; what they do not express by means of a physical resemblance, they express by the abstract but immediate language of symbolism, a language which is built up of precision and imponderables both

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together. Thus the icon, in addition to the beatific power which is inherent in it by reason of its sacramental character, transmits the holiness or inner reality of the Virgin and hence the universal reality of which the Virgin herself is an expression; in contributing both to a state of contemplation and to a metaphysical reality, the icon becomes a support of intellection, whereas a naturalistic image transmits only the fact—apart from its obvious and inevitable lie—that Mary was a woman. It is true that in the case of a particular icon it may happen that the proportions and features are those of the living Virgin, but such a likeness, if it really came to pass, would be independent of the symbolism of the image and could only be the result of a special inspiration, no doubt an unconscious one on the part of the artist himself. Naturalistic art could moreover be legitimate up to a certain point if it was used exclusively to set on record the features of the saints, since the contemplation of saints (the Hindu *darshan*) can be a very precious help in the spiritual way, owing to the fact that their outward appearance conveys, as it were, the perfume of their spirituality; but the use in this limited manner of a partial and 'disciplined' naturalism corresponds only to a very remote possibility.

To come back to the symbolic and spiritual quality of the icon: one's ability to perceive the spiritual quality of an icon or any other symbol is a question of contemplative intelligence and also of 'sacred science'. However, it is certainly false to claim, in justification of naturalism, that the people need an 'accessible', that is to say a platitudinous art, for it is not the 'people' who gave birth to the Renaissance; the art of the latter, like all the 'fine art' which is derived from it, is on the contrary an offence to the piety of the simple person. The artistic ideals of the Renaissance and of all modern art are therefore very far removed from what the people need, and, in fact, nearly all the miraculous Virgins to which people are attracted are Byzantine or Romanesque; and who would presume to argue that the black colouring of some of them agrees with popular taste or is particularly accessible to it? On the other hand, the Virgins made by the hands of the people, when they have not been

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corrupted by the influence of academic art, are very much more 'real', even in a subjective way, than those of the latter; and even if one were prepared to admit that the majority demand empty or unintelligent images, can it be said that the needs of the *élite* are never to be taken into consideration?

In the preceding paragraphs, we have already implicitly answered the question as to whether sacred art is meant to cater for the intellectual *élite* alone, or whether it has something to offer to the man of average intelligence. This question solves itself when one takes into consideration the universality of all symbolism, for this universality enables sacred art to transmit—apart from metaphysical truths and facts derived from sacred history—not only spiritual states of the mind, but psychological attitudes which are accessible to all men; in modern parlance, one might say that such art is both profound and 'naïve' at the same time, and this combination of profundity and 'naïvety' is precisely one of the dominant characteristics of sacred art. The 'ingenuousness' or 'candour' of such art, far from being due to a spontaneous or affected inferiority, reveals on the contrary the normal state of the human soul, whether it be that of the average or of the above-average man; the apparent 'intelligence' of naturalism, on the other hand, that is to say, its well-nigh satanic skill in copying Nature and thus transmitting nothing but the hollow shell of beings and things, can only correspond to a deformed mentality, we might say to one which has deviated from primordial simplicity or 'innocence'. It goes without saying that such a deformation, resulting as it does from intellectual superficiality and mental virtuosity, is incompatible with the traditional spirit and consequently finds no place in a civilization that has remained faithful to that spirit. Therefore if sacred art appeals to contemplative intelligence, it likewise appeals to normal human sensibility. This means that such art alone possesses a universal language, and that none is better fitted to appeal, not only to an *élite*, but also to the people at large. Let us remember, too, as far as the apparently 'childish' aspect of the traditional mentality is concerned, Christ's injunction to be 'as little children' and 'simple as doves', words

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which, no matter what may be their spiritual meaning, also quite plainly refer to psychological realities.

The monks of the eighteenth century, very different from those religious authorities of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who betrayed Christian art by abandoning it to the impure passions of worldly men and the ignorant imagination of the profane, were fully conscious of the holiness of every kind of means able to express the Tradition. They stipulated, at the second council of Nicaea, that 'art' (i.e. 'the perfection of work') alone belongs to the painter, while ordinance (the choice of the subject) and disposition (the treatment of the subject from the symbolical as well as the technical or material points of view) belongs to the Fathers. (*Non est pictoris-ejus enim sola ars estrerum ordinatio et dispositio Patrum nostrorum.*) This amounts to placing all artistic initiative under the direct and active authority of the spiritual leaders of Christianity. Such being the case, how can one explain the fact that during recent centuries, religious circles have, for the most part shown such a regrettable lack of understanding in respect of all those things which, having an artistic character, are, as they fondly believe, only external matters? First of all, admitting *a priori* the elimination of every esoteric influence, there is the fact that a religious perspective as such has a tendency to identify itself with the moral point of view, which stresses merit only and believes it is necessary to ignore the sanctifying quality of intellectual knowledge, and, as a result, the value of the supports of such knowledge; now, the perfection of sensible forms is no more 'meritorious' in the moral sense than the intellections which those forms reflect and transmit, and it is therefore only logical that symbolic forms, when they are no longer understood, should be relegated to the background, and even forsaken, in order to be replaced by forms which will no longer appeal to the intelligence, but only to a sentimental imagination capable of inspiring the meritorious act—at least such is the belief of the man of limited intelligence. However, this sort of speculative provocation of reactions by resorting to means of a superficial and vulgar nature will, in the last analysis, prove to be illusory, for, in

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reality, nothing can be better fitted to influence the deeper dispositions of the soul than sacred art. Profane art, on the contrary, even if it be of some psychological value in the case of souls of inferior intelligence, soon exhausts its means, by the very fact of their superficiality and vulgarity, after which it can only provoke reactions of contempt; these are only too common, and may be considered as a 'rebound' of the contempt in which sacred art was held by profane art, especially in its earlier stages.* It has been a matter of current experience that nothing is able to offer to irreligion a more immediately tangible nourishment than the insipid hypocrisy of religious images; that which was meant to stimulate piety in the believer, but serves to confirm unbelievers in their impiety, whereas it must be recognized that genuinely sacred art does not possess this character of a 'two-edged weapon', for being itself more abstract, it offers less hold to hostile psychological reactions. Now, no matter what may be the theories that attribute to the people the need for unintelligent images, warped in their essence, the *élites* do exist and certainly require something different; what they demand is an art corresponding to their own spirit and in which their soul can come to rest, finding itself again in order to mount to the Divine. Such an art cannot spring simply from profane taste, nor even from 'genius', but must proceed essentially out of Tradition; this fact being admitted, the masterpiece must be executed by a sanctified artist or, let us say, by one 'in a state of grace'.† Far from serving only for the more or less super-

* In the same way, the hostility of the representatives of exotericism for all that lies beyond their comprehension results in an increasingly 'massive' exotericism which cannot but suffer from 'rifts'; but the 'spiritual porousness' of Tradition—that is to say the immanence in the 'substance' of exotericism of a transcendent 'dimension' which makes up for its 'massiveness',—this state of 'porousness' having been lost, the above-mentioned 'rifts' could only be produced from below; which is the replacement of the masters of mediæval esotericism by the protagonists of modern unbelief.

† The icon-painters were monks who, before setting to work, prepared themselves by fasting, prayer, confession and communion; it even happened that the colours were mixed with holy water and the dust from relics, as would not have been possible had the icon not possessed a really sacramental character.

ficial instruction and edification of the masses, the icon, as is the case with the Hindu *yantra* and all other visible symbols, establishes a bridge from the sensible to the spiritual: 'By the visible aspect', states St. John Damascenus, 'our thoughts must be drawn up in a spiritual flight and rise to the invisible majesty of God.'

But let us return to the errors of naturalism. Art, as soon as it is no longer determined, illuminated and guided by spirituality, lies at the mercy of the individual and purely psychical resources of the artist, and these resources must soon run out, if only because of the very platitude of the naturalistic principle which calls only for a superficial tracing of Nature. Reaching the dead-point of its own platitude, naturalism inevitably engendered the monstrosities of 'surrealism'. The latter is but the decomposing body of an art, and in any case should rather be called 'infra-realism'; it is properly speaking the satanic consequence of naturalistic luciferianism. Naturalism, as a matter of fact, is clearly luciferian in its wish to imitate the creations of God, not to mention its affirmation of the psychical element to the detriment of the spiritual, of the individual to the detriment of the universal, of the bare fact to the detriment of the symbol. Normally, man must imitate the creative act, not the thing created; that is what is done by symbolic art, and the results are 'creations' which are not would-be duplications of those of God, but rather a reflection of them according to a real analogy, revealing the transcendental aspects of things; and this revelation is the only sufficient reason of art, apart from any practical uses such and such objects may serve. There is here a metaphysical inversion of relation which we have already pointed out: for God, His creature is a reflection or an 'exteriorized' aspect of Himself; for the artist, on the contrary, the work is a reflection of an inner reality of which he himself is only an outward aspect; God creates His own image, while man, so to speak, fashions his own essence, at least symbolically. On the principal plane, the inner manifests the outer, but on the manifested plane, the outer fashions the inner, and a sufficient reason for all traditional art, no matter of what kind,

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is the fact that in a certain sense the work is greater than the artist himself and brings back the latter, through the mystery of artistic creation, to the proximity of his own Divine Essence.*

* This explains the danger, so far as Semitic peoples are concerned, that lies in the painting and especially in the carving of living things. Where the Hindu and the inhabitant of the Far East adores a Divine reality through a symbol—and we know that a symbol is truly what it symbolizes as far as its essential reality is concerned—the Semite will display a tendency to deify the symbol itself; one of the reasons for the prohibition of plastic and pictorial arts amongst the Semitic peoples was certainly a wish to prevent naturalistic deviations, a very real danger among men whose mentality demanded a Tradition religious in form.

Chapter V

LIMITS OF RELIGIOUS
EXPANSION

I

We must now return to the more direct aspects of the question of the unity of traditional forms, and we propose to show in this chapter how the symbolic universality of each of these forms implies limitations in relation to universality in the absolute sense. True affirmations, being concerned with sacred facts—such as, for example, the person of Christ—which necessarily and by definition manifest universal truths, are liable to become false to a greater or lesser degree when artificially removed from their providential framework. So far as Christianity is concerned this framework is the Western World, in which Christ is ‘the Life’, with the definite article and without epithet. Modern disorder has destroyed this framework and ‘humanity’ has outwardly expanded in an ‘artificial’ or ‘quantitative’ manner. The result is that some people refuse to admit other ‘Christs’, while others arrive at the opposite conclusion and deny to Jesus the quality of Christ. It is as though certain persons, when faced with the discovery of other solar systems, continued to maintain the view that there is only one sun, our own, whereas others, perceiving that our sun is not the only one, denied that it was a sun and concluded that there was no such thing, since none was unique. The truth of the matter lies between the two opinions: our sun truly is ‘the sun’, but it is unique solely in relation to the system of which it is the

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centre; just as there are many solar systems, so there are many suns, but this does not prevent each being unique by definition. The sun, the lion, the eagle, the sunflower, honey, amber, gold, are so many natural manifestations of the solar principle, each unique and symbolically absolute in its own domain; the fact that they cease to be unique when detached from the limits which enclose these domains and make of them so many closed systems or microcosms, the relativity of their 'unicity' being then revealed, is in no way inconsistent with the fact that within their respective domains and for these domains, these manifestations are really identified with the solar principle, clothing it in modes appropriate to the possibilities of the domain they belong to. To state that Christ is not 'the Son of God', but only 'a Son of God', would thus be false, for the Word is unique, and each of its manifestations essentially reflects this Divine unicity.

Certain passages of the New Testament contain indications that the 'world' in which Christ is the 'Sun' is identified with the Roman Empire, which represented the providential sphere of expansion and life for the Christian civilization. When mention is made in these texts of 'every nation under heaven' (Acts ii. 5-11), it is in fact only nations known to the Roman world that are referred to;¹ and similarly, when it is said there is 'none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved' (Acts iv. 12), there is no reason to suppose that the expression 'under heaven' means anything more than it does in the first mentioned passage; unless, of course, the name 'Jesus' be understood as a symbolic designation of the Word Itself, which would imply that in the world there is one name only, the Word, by which men can be saved, whatever the Divine manifestation designated by this name in any particular case, or in other words, whatever the particular form of this eternal Name, be it 'Jesus', 'Buddha' or any other.

This raises a question which cannot be passed over in silence, namely, whether the activity of missionaries working outside the predestined and 'normal' world of Christianity is altogether illegitimate. To this it must be answered that missionaries—

¹ See note on p. 113.

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although they have profited from abnormal circumstances inasmuch as Western expansion at the expense of other civilizations is due solely to a crushing material superiority arising out of the modern deviation—follow a way which possesses, at least in principle, a sacrificial aspect; consequently the ‘subjective’ reality of this way will always retain its mystic meaning, independently of the ‘objective’ reality of missionary activity. The positive aspect which this activity derives from its evangelical origin cannot in fact entirely be lost merely through overstepping the boundaries of the Christian world—which indeed had been done before modern times, though in exceptional circumstances and under quite different conditions—and by encroaching upon worlds which, though not having Christ Jesus, are ‘Christian’ inasmuch as they have the Universal Christ who is the Word which inspires all Revelation, and therefore do not need conversion. But this positive aspect of missionary activity is only manifested in the ‘objective’ world in more or less exceptional cases, either because the spiritual influence emanating from a saint or relic proves stronger than the force of an ‘autochthonous’ spiritual influence weakened by the existing materialism of the local environment, or because Christianity is better suited to the particular mentality of certain individuals, which necessarily supposes a lack of comprehension by the latter of their own Tradition, and the presence in them of aspirations, spiritual or otherwise, which Christianity under one form or another will satisfy. Most of these remarks are of course also applicable in an inverse sense and in favour of non-Christian Traditions, with the difference, however, that in this case conversions are much more rare, for reasons not complimentary to the West. In the first place the East possesses no colonies or ‘protectorates’ in the West and does not maintain powerfully protected missions there; and secondly, Westerners turn much more readily to pure and simple unbelief than to an alien spirituality. As for the reservations that can be made in regard to missionary activity, it is important never to lose sight of the fact that they cannot concern its direct and evangelical aspect—except as regards the inevitable diminution and even the decadence of this aspect

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itself, due to the abnormal circumstances already referred to—but simply and solely its solidarity with modern Western barbarism.

We will take this opportunity of pointing out that the East was already in a state of great decadence at the time when Western expansion began, though this decadence can by no means be compared with the decadence of the modern West, the nature of which is, in certain secondary respects at least, the very reverse of that of Eastern decadence. Whereas the latter is 'passive' and may be compared to the decay of a physical organism worn out with age, the specifically modern decadence is, on the contrary, 'active' and 'voluntary', 'cerebral' so to speak, and it is this that gives to the Westerner the illusion of a 'superiority' which, even if it really exists on a certain psychological plane by reason of the difference we have just mentioned, is none the less very relative and disappears altogether when contrasted with the spiritual superiority of the East. It could also be said that the decadence of the East is based on 'inertia', while that of the West is based on 'error'; the only thing that links the two together is the common predominance of the passionate element, and it is in fact the predominance of this element which, in the human sphere, characterizes the 'Dark Age' in which the whole world is immersed and which was foretold by all the sacred doctrines. If this difference in the modes of decadence explains on the one hand the contempt that many Westerners experience on meeting certain Orientals—a contempt which unfortunately is not always the result of mere prejudice as is the case where hatred of the traditional East is concerned—and on the other the blind admiration that too many Orientals have for certain positive elements in the Western mentality, it also goes without saying that the contempt of the old East for the modern West is justified in a way which is not merely psychological, and therefore relative and debatable, but on the contrary complete and total, because it is founded on spiritual reasons which alone are decisive. In the eyes of the East when faithful to its own spirit, the 'progress' of Westerners will never be anything but a vicious circle which vainly seeks to

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eliminate inevitable miseries at the cost of the only thing that gives any meaning to life.

But let us return once more to the missionary question. The fact that it may be legitimate to pass from one traditional form to another in no way prevents a real apostasy in certain cases: an apostate is one who changes from one traditional form to another without valid reason; on the other hand when a 'conversion' takes place from one orthodox Tradition to another, the reasons invoked have at least a 'subjective' validity. It goes without saying that it is possible to pass from one traditional form to another without being converted, which may happen for reasons of esoteric, and therefore spiritual, expediency; in this case the reasons determining such a passage will be 'objectively' as well as 'subjectively' valid, or rather it will no longer be possible to speak of 'subjective' reasons in any sense.

We have already seen that the attitude of exotericism relatively to alien traditional forms is determined by two factors, one positive and the other negative, the first being the character of 'unicity' inherent in every Revelation, and the second, which is an extrinsic consequence of this 'unicity', the rejection of a particular 'paganism'. So far as Christianity is concerned, it is sufficient to situate it within its normal limits of expansion—which, apart from rare exceptions, it would never have overstepped but for the modern deviation—to understand that these two factors are not literally applicable outside their quasi natural limits, but have on the contrary to be universalized, that is to say transposed on to the plane of the Primordial Tradition which lives perpetually in every orthodox traditional form. In other words, it is necessary to understand that each of these alien traditional forms can also lay claim to this 'unicity' and this right to deny 'paganism', which amounts to saying that each one, by its intrinsic orthodoxy, is a form of what in Christian language is called the 'Eternal Church'.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the 'literal' meaning of the Divine sayings concerning human contingencies is by definition a limited meaning; that is to say it stops short at the confines of the particular realm to which it is destined to

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apply in accordance with the Divine 'intention'—the criterion of which resides fundamentally in the very nature of things, at least under normal conditions—and it is the purely spiritual meaning alone which is able to lay claim to absoluteness. The injunction to 'teach all nations' is no exception, any more than are other sayings where the 'natural' limitation of their literal meaning is obvious to everyone, doubtless because there is no advantage to be gained by conferring an unconditional meaning upon them: examples that come to mind are the commandment against killing, or the instruction to turn the left cheek, or that against using vain repetitions in prayer, and finally the command to take no heed of the morrow. Nevertheless the Divine Master never specified in so many words the limits within which these commands were valid, so that there is no logical reason for interpreting these injunctions differently to the injunction to 'teach all nations'. That being said, it is nevertheless important to add that the directly literal meaning, the 'word for word' interpretation, is obviously included also to a certain degree, not only in the command to preach to all nations, but also in the other sayings of Christ we have just mentioned; what matters is to be able to put this meaning in its proper place, without excluding other possible meanings. If it be true that the command to teach all nations cannot be read as being absolutely limited in its purpose to the establishment of the Christian world, but also implies, in a secondary way, the preaching of the Gospel to all peoples within reach, it is quite as true that the injunction to turn the left cheek is also to be understood literally in certain cases of spiritual discipline; but it also follows that the latter interpretation will be just as secondary as the literal interpretation of the command to preach to all peoples. In order to define clearly the difference between the primary meaning of this command and its secondary meaning, we will recall the distinction already drawn earlier on, namely that in the first case the end is primarily 'objective', since it is a question of establishing the Christian world, while in the second case, that of preaching to people of alien civilizations, the end is primarily 'subjective' and spiritual, in the sense that

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its inward aspect is more important than its outward one, which here is only a support of sacrificial realization. By way of objection the following words of Christ may no doubt be quoted: 'This Gospel of the Kingdom will be taught among all men, as a testimony to all nations; then the end will come'; but the answer is that if these words refer to the whole world and not just to the West, it is because they are not a command but a prophecy, and because they relate to cyclic conditions in which separating barriers between the different traditional worlds will have disappeared; in other words, we can say that 'Christ', who for the Hindus will be the *Kalki-Avatāra* and for the Buddhists the *Bodhisattva-Maitreya*, will restore the Primordial Tradition.

2

We have said above that the commandment given by Christ to the Apostles was restricted in its application by the limits of the Roman world itself, these limits being providential and not arbitrary; but it goes without saying that a limitation of this kind is not peculiar to the Christian world: Moslem expansion, for example, is necessarily confined within analogous limits and for the same reasons. Accordingly, although the Arabian 'polytheists' were given the alternative of Islam or death, this principle was abandoned as soon as the frontiers of Arabia were left behind; thus the Hindus, who moreover are not monotheists*, although governed by Moslem monarchs for several centuries, were never subjected after their conquest to the alternative imposed not long before upon the Arab 'pagans'. Another example is to be found in the traditional delimitation of the Hindu world. It must be added that the claim of Hinduism to universality, in conformity with the metaphysical and contemplative nature of this Tradition, is marked by a serenity not to be

* Monotheists are 'The People of the Book' (*ahl El-Kitāb*), that is to say Jews and Christians who have received revelations in the line of Abraham. It seems almost superfluous to add that the Hindus, though not 'monotheists' in the specifically religious sense, are certainly not 'polytheists', since consciousness of Metaphysical Unity throughout the indefinite multiplicity of forms is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the Hindu spirit.

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found in the religions properly so-called. The conception of *Sanātana-Dharma*, the 'Eternal (or Primordial) Law', is 'static' and not 'dynamic', in the sense that it is an acknowledgement of fact and not an aspiration as in the case of the corresponding religious conceptions: the latter have their root in the idea that it is necessary to bring to mankind the true faith it does not yet possess, while, according to the Hindu conception, the Brahmanic Tradition is the original Truth and Law which others no longer possess, either because what they have is only a fragment or because they have altered it, or even replaced it by errors; there is nevertheless no point in converting them, because, even though fallen from the *Sanātana-Dharma*, they are not thereby excluded from salvation, being simply in spiritual conditions less favourable than those of the Hindus. From the Hindu standpoint, there is nothing in principle to prevent 'barbarians' from being *Yogīs* or even *Avatāras*; in fact Hindus venerate without distinction Moslem, Buddhist and Christian Saints, and indeed were it otherwise the term *Mleccha-Avatāra* ('Divine descent among the barbarians') would be meaningless; but it is considered that among non-Hindus saintliness will no doubt occur much more rarely than within the *Sanātana-Dharma*, of which the ultimate sanctuary is the holy land of India.*

In this connection it might be asked whether the penetration of the soil of India by Islam should not be regarded as an illegitimate encroachment from a traditional point of view, and the same question arises regarding those parts of China and south-east Asia which have become Moslem. To reply to this question it is necessary in the first place to dwell on matters which may appear somewhat remote, but which are none the

* There has even been an 'untouchable' in the South of India who was an *Avatāra* of *Shiva*, namely the great spiritual master Tiruvalluvar, the 'Divine', whose memory is still venerated in Tamil countries, and who has left an inspired book, the *Kural*.

The equivalent of the Hindu conception of *Sanātana-Dharma* is to be found in certain passages of the *Qoran* which state that there are no people to whom God has not sent a Prophet; the exoteric induction according to which all other peoples have rejected or forgotten their own particular Revelation has no foundation in the *Qoran* itself.

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less indispensable in this context. Before all else it is essential to take the following facts into account: if Hinduism has always adapted itself, as regards its spiritual life, to the cyclic conditions which it has had to face in the course of its historical existence, it has nevertheless always preserved its essentially 'primordial' character. This is particularly so as regards its formal structure, notwithstanding the secondary modifications brought about by the force of events, such as for example the almost indefinite splitting up of the castes; but at a certain 'cyclic moment' this primordiality, impregnated as it is with contemplative serenity, was overshadowed by the increasingly marked preponderance of the passionate element in the general mentality, in accordance with the law of decay which governs every cycle of terrestrial humanity. Hinduism thus came to lose some of its 'actuality' or 'vitality' in the gradual process of moving away from its origins, and neither spiritual readaptations such as the advent of the 'tantric' and 'bhaktic' ways, nor social readaptations such as the splitting up of the castes already referred to, sufficed to eliminate the 'disproportion' between the primordiality inherent in the Tradition and a mentality increasingly linked to the passions.* However, there could be no question of

* One of the signs of this obscuration is the literal interpretation of symbolic texts on transmigration, which gives rise to the reincarnationist theory; This same 'literalism', when applied to sacred images, gives rise to idolatry. Were it not for this 'pagan' aspect, which in practice taints the cult of many Hindus of lower caste, Islam could not have made so deep an impression in the Hindu world. If, in order to defend the reincarnationist interpretations of the Hindu Scriptures, reliance is placed on the literal sense of the texts, it would only be logical to interpret everything therein in a literal way, and one would then arrive not only at a crude anthropomorphism, but also at a crude and monstrous adoration of sensory nature, whether in the shape of elements, animals or objects; the fact that many Hindus do interpret the symbolism of transmigration according to the letter proves nothing else than an intellectual decadence, almost 'normal' in the *Kali-yuga*, and foreseen by the Scriptures. Moreover, in Western religions also, texts on posthumous conditions should not be understood literally: for example, the 'fire' of hell is not a physical fire, the 'bosom of Abraham' is not a corporeal bosom, the 'feast' of which Christ speaks is not made up of terrestrial foods and there are no plants in the 'gardens' spoken of by the *Qoran*, nor are 'houris' women of flesh and blood; moreover if reincarnation were a reality, all the typically religious doctrines would be false, since they never situate posthumous states

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Hinduism being replaced by a traditional form more adapted to the particular conditions of the second half of the *Kali-yuga*, since the Hindu world as a whole has obviously no need of a total transformation, the Revelation of *Manu Vaivasvata* having retained to a sufficient degree the 'actuality' or 'vitality' which justifies the persistence of a civilization. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that a paradoxical situation has arisen in Hinduism which may be described by saying that as a whole it is 'living' or 'actual', whilst being no longer so in certain of its secondary aspects. Each of these two realities was bound to have its own consequences in the exterior world: the consequence of the vitality of Hinduism was the invincible resistance that it put up to Buddhism and Islam, whilst the consequence of its enfeeblement was, firstly, the Buddhist wave which came only to depart, and secondly, the expansion, and particularly the stabilization, of the Islamic civilization on the soil of India.

But the presence of Islam in India cannot be explained solely by the fact that being the youngest of the great Revelations,* it is better adapted than Hinduism to the general conditions of the last millennium of the 'Dark Age'—or in other words by the fact that it makes more allowance for the preponderance of the element of passion in the souls of men—but is also attributable to another cause. The cyclic decadence carries with it an almost

on this earth; but all these considerations are relatively insignificant in view of the metaphysical impossibility of reincarnation. Even admitting that a great Hindu saint might adopt a literalist interpretation of the Scriptures in relation to a cosmological question such as transmigration, that still would prove nothing against his spirituality, since it is possible to conceive of a knowledge which is quite detached from purely cosmological realities, and which consists of an exclusively synthetic and 'inward' vision of the Divine Reality. The same would not apply in the case of a person whose vocation was to expound or comment on a specifically cosmological doctrine, but by reason of the spiritual laws which govern our times, such a vocation could hardly arise now within the framework of a particular Tradition.

* Islam is the last Revelation of the present cycle of terrestrial humanity, just as Hinduism represents the Primordial Tradition, though without identifying itself with it purely and simply, being in fact merely its most direct branch; consequently between these two traditional forms there is a cyclic or cosmic relationship which, as such, is in no way fortuitous.

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general obscurity, which goes hand in hand with a more or less considerable growth of population, particularly at the lower levels; but this decadence implies a complementary and compensatory cosmic tendency which will act within the social collectivity for the purpose of restoring, at least symbolically, the primitive quality. In the first instance the collectivity will be 'pierced', as it were, by exceptions, and this process will run parallel with its quantitative growth, as if the qualitative (or 'sattvic', conforming to pure Being) element within the collectivity were concentrated on particular cases by a compensatory effect of the quantitative expansion; and secondly, because of the same cosmic law of compensation, the spiritual means will tend to become more and more easy for those who are qualified and whose aspirations are serious. This law comes into play because the human cycle for which the castes are valid is nearing its end, and for this reason the compensation in question tends not merely to restore, symbolically and within certain limits, the original state of the castes, but even the state of humanity before the institution of castes. These considerations will make it possible to understand the positive and providential function of Islam in India; in the first place it is there to absorb elements which, owing to the new cyclic conditions referred to above, are no longer 'in their proper place' in the Hindu Tradition—we are thinking more particularly of elements belonging to the higher castes, the *Dwijas*—and secondly to absorb those elements of the *élite* which are to be found among the lower castes, who are thus 'rehabilitated' in a kind of primordial indifferenciation. Islam, with the synthetic simplicity of its form and spiritual means, is an instrument providentially adapted to close up certain 'fissures' appearing in more ancient and 'archaic' civilizations, and to 'attract' and 'neutralize' by its presence the germs of subversion contained in these 'fissures', and it is in this way—but in this way only—that the domains of these civilizations have partially entered into the providential sphere of Islamic expansion.

Finally, at the risk of being somewhat repetitive, we will examine this question from a rather different angle, so as not

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to neglect any possible aspect. The 'Brahmanic possibility' must in the end be manifested in all the castes, including even the *Shudras*, not merely in a purely analogous way, as has always been the case, but, on the contrary, directly; the reason for this is that the lowest caste, though but a 'part' in the beginning, has become a 'whole' towards the end of the cycle, and this 'whole' is comparable to a social 'totality'; the higher elements of this 'totality' have become so to speak 'normal exceptions'. In other words the present state of the castes re-enacts, to a certain extent and symbolically, the primordial indistinction, the intellectual differences between the castes having grown smaller and smaller. The lower castes, who have become very numerous, now in fact constitute a whole people and consequently embrace every human possibility, whilst the higher castes, who have not multiplied in the same proportion, have suffered a decay which is the more marked because 'the corruption of the best is the worst' (*corruptio optimi pessima*). It must, however, be emphasized, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that from the collective and hereditary standpoint, the *élite* among the lower castes remain 'exceptions which prove the rule', and for this reason cannot legitimately mingle with the higher castes, though this does not prevent their being individually qualified to follow the ways normally reserved for the noble castes. Thus the system of castes, which for thousands of years has been a factor of equilibrium, necessarily reveals certain 'fissures' at the end of the *Mahā-yuga*, in imitation of the disequilibrium of the terrestrial environment itself. As regards the positive aspect implied by these 'fissures', it arises from the same cosmic law of compensation which Ibn Arabī had in mind when he said, as the Prophet had already said in other words before him, that at the end of time the flames of hell would grow cold; and it is this same law which is responsible for the saying of the Prophet that towards the end of the world he who accomplishes but a tenth of what Islam exacted in the beginning will be saved. What has been said naturally applies to humanity as a whole and not only to the Hindu castes; and as for the 'fissures' the existence of which we have noted in the outer structure of

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Hinduism, quite analogous phenomena appear in one degree or another in every traditional form.

With regard to the 'functional' analogy between Buddhism and Islam in relation to Hinduism—the two first-mentioned Traditions having the same negative and the same positive role in relation to the latter—Buddhists, whether Mahayanist or Hinayanist, are fully aware of it, for they see in the Moslem invasions of India a punishment for the persecutions which they themselves had to suffer at the hands of the Hindus.

3

After this digression, which was necessary in order to explain an important aspect of Moslem expansion, we will return to a more fundamental question, that of the duality of meanings inherent in the Divine injunctions concerning human things. This duality is prefigured in the very name of 'Jesus-Christ': 'Jesus'—like 'Gotama' and 'Mohammed'—indicates the limited and relative aspect of the manifestation of the Spirit, and denotes the support of this manifestation; 'Christ'—like 'Buddha' and 'Rasūl Allāh'—indicates the Universal Reality of this same manifestation, that is to say the Word as such; and this duality of aspects reappears in the distinction between the 'human' and 'Divine' natures of Christ, though the viewpoint of theology does not permit of all the consequences being drawn from this distinction.

Now if the Apostles conceived Christ and their mission in an absolute sense, it must not be assumed that the reason for this lies in some intellectual limitation on their part, and it is necessary to take into account the fact that in the Roman world Christ and His Church possessed a unique and therefore 'relatively absolute' character. This expression, which looks like a contradiction in terms, and which logically is so, nevertheless corresponds to a reality: the Absolute must also be reflected 'as such' in the relative, and this reflection then becomes, in relation to other relativities, 'relatively absolute'. For example, the difference between two errors can only be relative, at least from

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the standpoint of their falsity, one being merely more false—or less false—than the other; on the other hand the difference between error and truth will be absolute, but in a relative way only, that is to say without going beyond the realm of relativities, since error, being only a more or less admitted negation of truth cannot be absolutely independent of the latter; in other words error, not being positive, cannot be opposed to truth as one equal to another and as an independent reality. This makes it possible to understand why there cannot be such a thing as the 'absolutely relative': the latter would be pure nothingness and as such could have no kind of existence. As we were saying, in the Roman world Christ and His Church possessed a unique and therefore 'relatively absolute' character; in other words, the principal, metaphysical and symbolic unicity of Christ, of the Redemption and of the Church was necessarily expressed by a unicity of fact on the terrestrial plane. If the Apostles were not called upon to formulate the metaphysical limits which every fact carries with it by definition, and if in consequence they were not called upon to take account of traditional universality on the ground of facts, this does not mean that their spiritual Science did not include knowledge of this universality in principle, even though this knowledge was not actualized as regards possible applications to determined contingencies. For example, an eye capable of seeing a circle is capable of seeing all forms, even though they may not be present and the eye is looking only at the circle. The question of knowing what the Apostles or Christ himself would have said had they met a being such as the Buddha is quite pointless, for things of this kind never happen, since they would be contrary to cosmic laws; perhaps it is not too much to say that no one has ever heard of meetings taking place between great saints belonging to different civilizations. In the world destined to receive their radiation the Apostles were, by definition, a unique group. Even if the presence in their sphere of action of Essenian, Pythagorean or other initiates must be admitted, the inconspicuous light of these very small minorities must necessarily have been 'drowned' in the radiance of the light of Christ, and the Apostles were not concerned with

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these few men who were 'whole', for 'I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners . . .' (Matt. ix. 13). From a rather different point of view, though one connected with the same principle of traditional delimitation, it may be noted that according to a rather enigmatic passage from the Acts of the Apostles (xvi. 6-8), Saint Paul, who for Christianity was the primordial architect of expansion, as Omar was at a later date for Islam, avoided penetrating into the providential domain of this last form of Revelation. Without insisting on the fact that the limits of these fields of expansion obviously do not have the precise definition of political frontiers, we will merely add that the return of the Apostle of the Gentiles towards the West has not least a symbolical value, not so much in relation to Islam as in relation to the delimitation of the Christian world itself; moreover the manner in which this episode is related, with references to the intervention of the Holy Ghost and the 'Spirit' of Jesus, but with no mention of the contingent causes of these inspirations, make it impossible to accept the view that the reason for the Apostle's having refrained from preaching and for his abrupt return was a purely external one with no principial significance, or that the episode in question was an ordinary incident of his journeyings.* Finally, the fact that the province where this intervention of the Spirit occurred was called 'Asia' adds further to the symbolical significance of the circumstances in question.

* We wish to state clearly that if we make use of specific examples instead of keeping to principles and generalities, this is never with the intention of convincing opponents whose minds are already made up, but simply to enable those who wish to understand to get a glimpse of certain aspects of reality; it is for the latter alone that we are writing, and we decline to enter into polemics which would interest neither our eventual contradictors nor ourselves. It must be added that we have not touched on the facts quoted by way of example for the sake of historical interest, for these facts do not matter in themselves, but solely in so far as they assist in the understanding of transcendent truths, which for their part are never dependent on facts.

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NOTE

(1) [See p. 99] When speaking of 'Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.' (*ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ex omni natione quae sub caelo est*), it is obvious that the Scriptures cannot have the Japanese or the Peruvians in mind, although these people also belong to this terrestrial world which is 'under heaven'; moreover the same text makes clear later on what the authors of the New Testament meant by 'every nation under heaven': 'We, Parthians and Medes, and Elamites and the dwellers in Mesopotamia and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia (Minor), Phrygia, and Pamphylia in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.' (Acts ii. 5-11). The same necessarily restricted conception of the geographical and ethnic world is also implied in these words of Saint Paul: 'First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all (of the Church of Rome), that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world' (*ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ, in universo mundo*). It is obvious that the author of these words did not mean to imply that the faith of the Primitive Church of Rome was known among all peoples who, according to present day geographical knowledge, make up the 'whole world', including for example the Mongols or the Aztecs; the 'world' was and is, for Christianity, the Western world, with certain extensions towards the Near-East. When Saint Paul says of the Apostles, (Romans x. 18) interpreting two verses of Psalm xix, the sense of which moreover is essentially metaphysical, that 'their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world' (for: 'There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world'), who will accuse him of error or falsehood on the grounds that no Apostle had preached in Siberia or in any other almost inaccessible country, or who will deny that his manner of speaking, since it must have a sense, can only be explained and justified by the necessary and inevitable limitation of every traditional 'world'? Similarly when St. Justin Martyr said, a century after Jesus Christ, that there is no human race, whether Greek, Barbarian or any other, among whom the name of Christ is not invoked, who would think of interpreting these words literally and of accusing the saint either of falsehood or error? Christ issued the command to 'teach all nations' (Matt. xxix. 19), and it is assumed that this refers to everyone who inhabits the terrestrial globe; but when Christ orders 'Go ye into the

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world, and preach the gospel to every (creature' Mark xvi. 15), care is taken not to interpret this literally and preach to every creature without exception, including animals and plants; and especial care is taken to avoid a literal interpretation of the sequel to the same passage, according to which believers are characterised by miraculous gifts such as immunity against poison and power to cure the sick. It is significant moreover that the Acts of the Apostles make no mention whatever of the activities of those Apostles who had moved away from the Roman World; while on the other hand, Saint Paul and his companion Timothy were 'forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia', and when they arrived at Mysia and tried to go into Bithynia 'the Spirit suffered them not' (Acts xvi. 6-7).

All these examples indicate in a more or less direct way that for Christianity the Roman world is symbolically and traditionally identified with the whole world, in the same way that for the Chinese Tradition, for example, the Chinese people means all humanity; but so far as Christianity is concerned, there is yet another and still more positive indication in support of what we have just said; it is that Christian Rome, the centre of the western Christian world, is heir to Ancient Rome, the centre of the Roman world, and that the Pope, at least as 'Supreme Pontiff' (*pontifex maximus*), is heir to the Roman Emperor; and let us not forget that Christ, in saying: 'Give unto Caesar those things which are Caesar's', recognised and as it were consecrated the traditional legitimacy of the Emperor.

Chapter VI

THE TERNARY ASPECT OF
MONOTHEISM

I

The transcendent unity of the traditional forms is illustrated in a particularly instructive manner by the reciprocal relationships existing between the three great so-called 'monotheistic' Traditions; and this is precisely because these three Traditions alone present themselves in the form of irreconcilable exotericisms. First of all, however, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between what may be called 'symbolical truth' and 'objective truth'. To illustrate this distinction we may take as an example the arguments of Christianity and Buddhism with regard to the traditional forms from which they may be said to have respectively issued, namely Judaism in the first case and Hinduism in the second. These arguments are 'symbolically true', in the sense that the 'rejected' forms are not considered in themselves and from the standpoint of their intrinsic truth, but solely in certain contingent and negative aspects that are due to a partial decadence; the rejection of the *Veda* therefore corresponds to a truth in so far as this scripture is viewed exclusively as the symbol of a sterile erudition which was widespread in the time of Buddha, and the rejection by St. Paul of the Jewish Law was justified in so far as the latter corresponded to a Pharisaical formalism lacking spiritual life. If a new Revelation may thus justifiably depreciate traditional values of an earlier origin, it is because

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it is independent of these values and has no need of them, since it possesses equivalent values of its own and is therefore entirely self-sufficient.

This truth likewise applies within one and the same traditional form, for instance with respect to the antinomy between the Latin and Greek Churches; the 'schism' is a contingency which can in no way affect the intrinsic and essential reality of the two Churches. The schism in question is not moreover, any more than the Moslem schism which gave birth to Shiite Islam, due solely to the will of individuals, whatever the appearances may be, but springs from the very nature of the Tradition which it divides outwardly, though not inwardly. Owing to ethnical and other contingencies, the spirit of the Tradition may require different, though always orthodox adaptations. The same considerations do not, of course, apply in the case of heresies, which divide the Tradition both inwardly and outwardly—though unable to effect a real division, since error is not a part of truth—and which instead of merely being incompatible on the formal plane with other aspects of a self-same truth, are false in themselves.

Let us now consider as a whole the question of the spiritual and cyclic homogeneity of the religions. Monotheism, which embraces the Jewish, Christian and Islamic Traditions, that is to say the religions properly so-called, is essentially based on a dogmatic conception of the Divine Unity (or 'Non-Duality'). If we speak of this conception as being dogmatic, this is to indicate that it is accompanied by an exclusion of every other point of view, failing which an exoteric application, which is the justification for all dogmas, would not be possible. We have previously seen that this restriction, though necessary for the vitality of the religious forms, is fundamentally responsible for the limitation inherent in the religious point of view as such; in other words the religious viewpoint is characterized by an incompatibility within its own field between conceptions which in form are apparently opposed to one another, whereas in the case of purely metaphysical or initiatory doctrines, formulations which on the surface are con-

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tradictory are neither excluded nor regarded as being in any way embarrassing.*

The monotheistic Tradition belonged originally to the entire nomadic branch of the Semitic group, a branch which having issued from Abraham was subdivided into two secondary branches, one issuing from Isaac and the other from Ishmael, and it was not until the time of Moses that monotheism took a Jewish form; it was Moses who, at a time when the Tradition of Abraham was growing dim among the Ishmaelites, was called upon to give monotheism a powerful support by linking it in a certain manner with the people of Israel, who thus became its guardians; but this adaptation, however necessary and providential it may have been, was also bound to lead to a restriction of the outward form, owing to the 'particularist' tendency inherent in each people. It may thus be said that Judaism

* The fact that certain data from the Scriptures are interpreted unilaterally by the representatives of exotericism proves that their limitative speculations are not entirely disinterested, as has already been shown in the chapter on exotericism. In fact the esoteric interpretation of a Revelation is admitted by exotericism whenever it serves to confirm the latter, and it is on the contrary arbitrarily passed over whenever it might prove harmful to that outward dogmatism which is the refuge of sentimental individualism. Thus the truth represented by Christ, which by its form belongs to Jewish esotericism, is invoked in condemnation of an excessive formalism in Judaism; but those who invoke it carefully refrain from making a universal application of this same truth by shedding its light on every form without exception, including the Christian. Again, according to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (iii. 27-iv. 17) man is justified by faith and not by works; however according to the General Epistle of St. James (ii. 14-26), man is justified by works and not by faith alone; both cite Abraham as an example. If these two texts had belonged to different religions, or even to two reciprocally 'schismatic' branches of a single religion, the theologians on either side would no doubt have set about proving their incompatibility; but since they belong to one and the same religion, efforts are made on the contrary to prove their perfect compatibility. Why is it that people are reluctant to admit Revelations other than their own? 'God cannot contradict Himself', it will be said, though this is merely begging the question. There are two alternatives: either it must be admitted that God really contradicts Himself, in which case no Revelation will be accepted; or else it must be admitted, since there is no other choice, that the contradictions are but an appearance, but then there will be no further justification for rejecting a foreign Revelation simply because at first sight it appears to be in contradiction with the Revelation of which the validity is admitted *a priori*.

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annexed monotheism and brought it into the possession of Israel, with the result that under this form the heritage of Abraham was henceforth inseparable from all the secondary adaptations and all the ritual and social consequences implicit in the Mosaic Law.

As a result of being thus canalized and crystallized in Judaism, monotheism acquired a quasi-historical character, though the word 'historical' should not here be understood exclusively in its ordinary outward meaning, which would be incompatible with the sacred nature of Israel. It is this absorption of the original Tradition by the Jewish people that makes it permissible to distinguish outwardly the monotheism of Moses from that of the Patriarchs, though such a distinction does not, of course, bear on the doctrinal domain. The historical character of Judaism, owing to its very nature, had a consequence which was not inherent in the original monotheism—not at least in the same form. This was the Messianic idea, and this idea is accordingly linked as such to the Mosaic tradition.

These few indications concerning the original monotheism, its adaptation by Moses, its 'annexation' by Judaism and its 'concretization' in the Messianic idea, are sufficient to enable us to proceed to a consideration of the 'organic' part played by Christianity in the monotheistic cycle. We may say, therefore, that Christianity absorbed in its turn the doctrinal heritage of monotheism through the affirmation of the Messiah, and it is perhaps permissible to add that it was entirely within its rights in doing so, since it was the legitimate culmination of the Jewish form. The Messiah, having to realize in His own person the Divine Will from which monotheism issued, necessarily transcended a form which was incapable of allowing the latter to realize its mission fully. In order that He might effect this dissolution of a transitory form it was necessary, as we have just indicated, that, as Messiah, He should possess to an eminent degree the authority inherent in the Tradition whose last word He was, and it is for this reason that He had to be 'greater' than Moses and 'before' Abraham. These affirmations point to an over-riding identity between the Messiah and God, and show

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that a Christianity which denies the Divinity of Christ denies the reason for its own existence.

We have said that the 'avatic' person of the Messiah entirely absorbed the monotheistic doctrine, which means that Christ was not only the culmination of historical Judaism, at least in a certain respect and up to a certain point, but also for that very reason the support of monotheism and the temple of the Divine Presence. This extreme historical positivity of Christ brought with it, however, in its turn a limitation of the traditional form, just as had happened in the case of Judaism, where Israel fulfilled the predominant function which was later to devolve upon the Messiah, a function that was necessarily restrictive and limitative from the point of view of the realization of integral monotheism. It is here that Islam steps in, and it remains for us to consider its position and significance in the monotheistic cycle.*

However, before going into this subject, there remains to be considered another aspect of the question with which we have been dealing. The Gospels relate the following saying of Christ: 'The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it'; and the Gospels also relate that at the moment of Christ's death the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; this and the saying just quoted both indicate that the coming of Christ put a final term to the tradition of Moses. But it may well be objected that the Mosaic tradition, in so far as it is the Word of God, cannot by any means be annulled, since

* The perspective we have just outlined brings to mind Joachim de Flora, who attributed to each Person of the Trinity a predominant position in relation to a certain part of the traditional cycle of the Christian perspective: the Father dominated the Old Law, the son the New Law, and the Holy Ghost the last phase of the Christian cycle which began with the new monastic orders founded by St. Francis and St. Dominic. The 'asymmetry' of these correspondences will at once be apparent: the author of this theory must have been ignorant (whether such ignorance was actual or professed) of the existence of Islam, which according to Islamic dogma actually corresponds to this reign of Paraclete; but it is nevertheless true that the period which according to Joachim de Flora was placed under the special influence of the Holy Ghost did see a renewal of spirituality in the West.

'our Torah is for all eternity, nothing can be added to it and nothing taken away from it'. (Maimonides); how, therefore, is one to reconcile the abrogation of the Tradition of Moses, or rather of the 'glorious' cycle of its terrestrial existence, with the 'eternity' of the Mosaic revelation? The first point to grasp is that this abrogation, though real in the realm to which it relates, is none the less relative, whereas the intrinsic reality of the Mosaic tradition is absolute, because Divine. This Divine quality necessarily resists the suppression of a Revelation, at least for so long as the doctrinal and ritual form of the latter remains intact, a condition which was fulfilled in the case of the Tradition of Moses, as is shown by the fact that Christ conformed to it.* The abrogation of the Mosaic Tradition by Christ springs from a Divine Volition, but the intangible permanence of that same Tradition is of a still profounder order, since it

* It is, however, important to observe that the decadence of Jewish esotericism at the time of Christ—for example, Nicodemus, a 'master in Israel', was unacquainted with the mystery of spiritual rebirth!—made it permissible from the standpoint of the new Revelation to regard the Mosaic Tradition in its entirety as an exclusive and therefore 'solid' exotericism, a way of looking at things which has nevertheless only an accidental and provisional value, since it is limited, in its application, to the origins of Christianity. However that may be, the Mosaic Law was not to govern access to the new Mysteries, as would have been the function of an exotericism in relation to an esotericism of which it was the complement, and another exotericism was established for the new Tradition, though at the cost of difficulties of adaptation and interferences which continued for centuries.

Meanwhile Judaism for its part reconstituted and re-adapted its own exotericism in the new cycle of its history, the *Diaspora*, and it seems that this process was to some extent correlative to the development of Christianity, thanks to the copious influx of spirituality accompanying the manifestation of the Word in the person of Christ. The influence of this manifestation made itself felt directly or indirectly, openly or in secret, throughout the whole neighbouring environment. This accounts, on the one hand, for the disappearance during the first century of the Christian cycle of the ancient Mysteries, a part of which was absorbed by Christian esotericism itself, and on the other hand for the irradiation of spiritual forces in the Mediterranean traditions during the same period, for example in Neo-Platonism. As regards Judaism, there existed until modern times, and perhaps still exists in certain places, a genuine esoteric tradition, whatever may have been the exact date of the revival that took place subsequently to the manifestation of Christ and the beginning of the new traditional cycle, the *Diaspora*, and notwithstanding the part later played by Islam in relation to both Judaism and Christianity.

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derives from the Divine Essence itself, of which this Volition is simply a particular manifestation, just as a wave is a particular manifestation of water, the nature of which it cannot modify. The Divine Volition manifested by Christ could only affect a particular mode of the Tradition of Moses and not its 'eternal' quality; although therefore the Real Presence (*Shekinah*) had left the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem, this Divine Presence has always continued to dwell in Israel, no longer, it is true, like an unquenchable fire localized in a sanctuary, but like a flint which, though not permanently manifesting fire, nevertheless contains it virtually, with the possibility of manifesting it periodically or incidentally.

2

Monotheism contained, in Judaism and Christianity, two great antagonistic expressions. Islam in its turn, although itself necessarily antagonistic in relation to these two forms, since its point of view is likewise religious, recapitulated them in a certain manner by harmonizing the Judaeo-Christian antagonism in a synthesis which marked the limit of the development and integral realization of monotheism. That this was so is confirmed by the simple fact that Islam is the third aspect of this traditional current; that is to say it represents the number 3, which is the number of harmony, whereas the number 2 represents an alternative and is not therefore self-sufficient, being compelled either to reduce itself to unity through the absorption of one of its terms by the other, or to recreate this unity by the production of a new unity. These two methods of realizing unity are in fact achieved by Islam, which itself provides the solution of the Judaeo-Christian antagonism from which in a certain sense it may be said to have issued, and which it annuls by reducing it to the pure monotheism of Abraham. In this connection Islam might be compared to a Judaism which had not rejected Christianity, or to a Christianity which had not denied Judaism; but if its attitude can be characterized in this way in so far as it was the product of Judaism and Christianity, it stands outside this

duality in so far as it identified itself with the origin of the latter, through its rejection of the Jewish 'development' on the one hand and the Christian 'transgression' on the other, and through its having restored to the place of central importance, acquired first by the Jewish people and then by Christ, the fundamental affirmation of monotheism, namely the Unity of God. As a condition of being able thus to transcend Messianism, it was necessary for Islam to place itself at a point of view which was different from that of the latter, and to reduce the latter to its own point of view in order to integrate it within itself; hence the integration of Christ in the line of Prophets, which extends from Adam to Mohammed. It goes without saying that Islam, like the two preceding religions, was born through a direct intervention of the Divine Will from which monotheism issued, and that the Prophet had to reflect in a particular way and through a corresponding realization the essential Messianic truth inherent in the original or Abrahamic monotheism. In a certain sense Islam can be called the Abrahamic 'reaction' against the annexation of monotheism by Israel on the one hand and by the Messiah on the other. Although metaphysically the two points of view are by no means mutually exclusive, on the religious plane they cannot be realized simultaneously and can only be affirmed by means of antagonistic dogmas which divide the outward aspect of integral monotheism.

If in a certain respect Judaism and Christianity present a single front against Islam, Christianity and Islam in their turn are opposed to Judaism, in consequence of their tendency towards a full realization of the monotheistic doctrine. We have seen, however, that in the case of the Christian form this tendency was limited by the predominance given to the Messianic idea, which is only of secondary importance from the standpoint of pure monotheism. The legislative element in Judaism was demolished by an 'exteriorization', here necessary and legitimate, of certain esoteric conceptions, and was absorbed in a manner of speaking by the 'next world', in conformity with the formula *Regnum meum non est de hoc mundo*. The social order was replaced by the spiritual, the sacraments of the Church

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representing the form of legislation appropriate to the latter order. But since this spiritual legislation does not meet social requirements, it was necessary to have recourse to heterogenous legislative elements, which created a cultural dualism that was harmful to the Christian world. Islam re-established a sacred legislation for 'this world', and in this way rejoined Judaism, while at the same time reaffirming the universality which Christianity had affirmed beforehand when breaking the shell of the Mosaic Law.

One thing more remains to be said: the equilibrium between the two Divine aspects of Justice and Mercy constitutes the very essence of the Mohammedan Revelation, in which it rejoins the Abrahamic Revelation. As for the Christian Revelation, if it affirms its superiority over the Mosaic Revelation, it is because the Divine Mercy is principally and ontologically 'anterior' to the Divine Justice, as is attested by this inscription on the Throne of *Allāh*: 'Verily, My Mercy precedeth My Wrath' (*Inna Rahmatī sabaqat Ghadabī*). The monotheism revealed to Abraham possessed esotericism and exotericism in perfect equilibrium, and as it were in their primordial indistinction, though there can only be question here of a primordially which is relative to the Traditions belonging to the Semitic stock. With Moses exotericism so to speak became the Tradition, in the sense that it determined the form of the latter without, however, affecting its essence; with Christ the reverse happened, and it was esotericism which in a certain manner became the Tradition in its turn; finally with Mohammed, the initial equilibrium is re-established and the cycle of the monotheistic Tradition is closed. These alterations in the integral Revelation of monotheism proceeded from the very nature of the latter and are not therefore imputable to contingent circumstances alone. Since both the 'letter' and the 'spirit' were synthetically comprised in the primordial or Abrahamic monotheism, they were bound to become crystallized in some fashion, by differentiation and successively, during the course of the cycle of the monotheistic Revelation; thus the Tradition of Abraham manifested the undifferentiated equilibrium of 'letter' and 'spirit', the Tradition

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of Moses the 'letter', Christianity the 'spirit', and Islam the differentiated equilibrium of these two aspects of Revelation.

Every Tradition is necessarily an adaptation, and adaptation implies limitation. If that is true of the purely metaphysical Traditions, it is still more true of the religions, which represent adaptations for the sake of more limited mentalities.* These limitations must needs be found in some manner or other in the origins of the traditional forms and it is inevitable that they should be manifested in the course of the development of these forms, becoming most marked at the end of this development, to which they themselves contribute. If these limitations are necessary for the vitality of a Tradition, they remain none the less limitations with the consequences which that implies. The heterodox doctrines themselves are indirect consequences of this need for curtailing the amplitude of the traditional form and for limiting it in proportion with the advance of the Dark Age. It could not indeed be otherwise, even in the case of the sacred symbols, because only the infinite, eternal and formless Essence is absolutely pure and unassailable, and because its transcendence must be made manifest by the dissolution of forms as well as by its radiation through them.

* If one is justified in saying that the mentality of Western peoples, including in this respect the peoples of the Near East, is in some ways more limited than the mentality of most Eastern peoples, this is primarily due to the intrusion of passion in the sphere of the intelligence; hence the tendency of Westerners to regard created things only under one aspect, that of 'plain fact', and their lack of aptitude for the intuitive contemplation of the cosmic and universal essences which are instilled in forms; this intrusion also explains the need for an abstract theism as a protection against the danger of idolatry as well as against that of pantheism. The mentality in question, owing to cyclic causes, has for centuries been becoming more and more widespread amongst all peoples, and this explains, on the one hand, the relative ease with which religious conversions are made amongst peoples whose civilization is non-religious, that is to say mythological or metaphysical, and on the other hand the providential nature of Moslem expansion within the domains of these civilizations.

Chapter VII

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

I

WE have seen that among the branches issuing more or less directly from the Primordial Tradition, Christianity and Islam represent the spiritual heritage of this Tradition according to different points of view. This immediately raises the question as to what exactly is represented by a 'point of view' as such. No difficulty can arise in this connection on the plane of physical vision, where the point of view determines a perspective which is always perfectly co-ordinated and necessary, and where things change their aspect whenever the observer alters his standpoint, although the elements of vision, namely the eye, light, colours, forms, proportions and situations in space, remain always the same. The starting point of vision may change, but not the vision in itself. Now if everybody admits that such is the case in the physical world, which is but a reflection of spiritual realities, how can it be denied that the same relations exist, or rather pre-exist, in the spiritual realm? Here the heart, organ of Revelation, corresponds to the eye; the Divine Principle, dispenser of light, to the sun; the Intellect to light; and the Realities or Divine Essences to the objects of vision. But whereas, generally speaking, nothing will prevent a living being from changing his physical point of view, it is quite another matter with the spiritual point of view, which always transcends the individual and regarding which the will of the latter can only remain determinate and passive.

In order to understand a spiritual point of view, or what

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amounts to the same, a traditional point of view, it is not sufficient to attempt to establish correspondences between traditional elements comparable from the outside, even with the best intentions. Such a procedure would be in danger of leading to a superficial synthesis of little value, though comparisons of this sort may nevertheless have their uses, on condition that they are not adopted as a starting-point and provided also that account is first taken of the inner constitution of the Traditions in question. In order to grasp a traditional point of view it is necessary to perceive the unity by which all its constituent elements are necessarily co-ordinated; this unity is the unity of the spiritual point of view, which is the germ of the Revelation. Needless to say the first cause of a Revelation cannot be assimilated to a point of view, any more than light can be said to depend on the spatial situation of the eye; what constitutes every Revelation and justifies the use of this term is the encounter of a unique Light with a limited and contingent sphere, which represents a kind of plane of spiritual reflection.

Before entering into particulars concerning the relationship between Christianity and Islam, it is not superfluous to observe that the mind of Western man, in so far as it is positive, is almost entirely of Christian essence. It does not lie within the power of men to rid themselves of so deep-seated a heredity by their own means, that is to say by mere ideological expedients; their minds move in age-old grooves even when they invent errors. One cannot set aside this intellectual and mental formation, however weakened it may be. This being the case, and given that some remnant of the traditional point of view survives unconsciously even among those who consider themselves freed from any attachment, or who, in their desire to be impartial, attempt to place themselves outside the Christian standpoint, how is it to be expected that the elements of other Traditions will be interpreted in their true sense? Is it not striking, for instance, that the opinions about Islam prevailing among the majority of Westerners are more or less identical, whether those who utter them profess to be Christians or pride themselves on no longer being so? Even the errors of philosophy would not be conceiv-

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able if they did not represent the negation of certain truths, and if those errors were not direct or indirect reactions against certain formal limitations of Tradition; from which it can be seen that no error, whatever may be its nature, can lay claim to complete independence relatively to the traditional conception which it rejects or disfigures.

A Tradition is an integral whole comparable to a living organism which develops according to necessary and exact laws; one might therefore call it a spiritual organism, or a social one in its most outward aspect. In any case it is an organism and not a construction of arbitrary conventions; one cannot therefore legitimately consider the constituent elements of a Tradition independently of their inward unity, as if one were concerned with a mere collection of facts. This error is one, however, which is frequently committed even by those who judge without preconceived opinions but who none the less endeavour to establish correspondences from the outside, without perceiving that a traditional element is always determined by the germ and starting point of the integral Tradition, and that a given element, a personality or a book for example, can have a different significance from one Tradition to another.

To illustrate these remarks, we are going to compare certain fundamental elements of the Christian and Islamic Traditions. The habitual want of comprehension of the ordinary representatives of either religion with regard to the other extends to almost insignificant details, such as for instance the term 'Mahometan' applied to Moslems, an expression which is an improper transposition of the term 'Christian'. The latter expression is perfectly applicable to the adherents of a religion which is based on Christ and which perpetuates Him in the Eucharist and the Mystical Body. The same does not, however, apply to Islam, which is not based directly on the Prophet but on the Qoran, the affirmation of Divine Unity, and which does not consist in a perpetuation of Mohammed, but in a ritual and legislative conformity of man and society to the Qoranic Law and therefore to Unity. On the other hand the Arabic term *mushrikūn*, 'associators' (of pseudo-divinities with God), which

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is aimed at the Christians, overlooks the fact that Christianity is not directly based on the idea of Unity and need not insist upon it, since its essential basis is the Mystery of Christ; nevertheless, inasmuch as the term *mushrikīm* is sacred—in its Qoranic significance—it is obviously the support of a truth which transcends the historical fact of the Christian religion. Moreover facts do not play so important a part in Islam as they do in Christianity, of which the religious basis is essentially a fact and not an idea as in the case of Islam. This serves to show where lies the fundamental divergence between the two traditional forms: for a Christian, all depends on the Incarnation and the Redemption; Christ absorbs everything, even the idea of the Divine Principle, which appears under a Trinitarian aspect, as well as humanity, which becomes His Mystical Body or the Church militant, suffering and triumphant. For a Moslem, all is centred in *Allāh*, the Divine Principle considered under the aspect of Unity* and of Transcendence, and in the state of conformity, of abandonment to Him: *El-Islām*. The idea of God made Man is at the centre of Christian Doctrine; the Son, second person of the Trinity, is man universalized; Jesus Christ is God individualized. Islam does not give the same predominance to the mediator; the latter does not absorb everything, and it is exclusively the monotheistic conception of Divinity which takes the central place in Islamic doctrine and dominates it throughout.

The importance attached by Islam to the idea of Unity may appear superfluous and sterile from the Christian point of view and a sort of pleonasm relatively to the Judæo-Christian Tradition. One must, however, bear in mind that the spontaneity and vitality of the Islamic Tradition can by no means be the fruit of external borrowing and that the intellectual originality of the Moslems can only proceed from a Revelation. Whereas in Islam the idea of Unity is the prop of all spirituality, and to a certain degree of all social applications, it is not the same in the case of Christianity; the central point of the latter, as we have

* It is expressly said in that Islamic *credo* the *Fikh el-akbar* of Abu Hanifa that *Allāh* is unique, not in the sense of number, but in the sense that He is without associate.

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already explained, is the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Redemption, universally conceived in the Trinity and without human application save in the sacraments and the participation in the Mystical Body of Christ. At no time, so far as may be judged from the historical data, has Christianity had a social application in the full sense of the word; never has it entirely integrated human society; in the form of the Church it imposed itself on men without attaching them to itself by assigning to them functions which would permit them to participate more directly in its inner life; it has not sufficiently hallowed human acts; it has left the entire laity outside itself, assigning to it only a more or less passive participation in the Tradition. Such is the organization of the Christian world as seen from a Moslem point of view. In Islam every man is his own priest by the mere fact of being a Moslem; he is the patriarch, *imām* or caliph of his family; in the latter is reflected the entire Islamic society. Man is in himself a unity; he is the image of the Creator whose vicar (*khalīfah*) he is on earth; he cannot accordingly be a layman. The family is also a unity; it is a society within a society, an impenetrable block,* like the at once responsible and resigned being, the Moslem himself, and like the whole Islamic world, which is of an almost incorruptible homogeneity and stability. Man, family and society are cast according to the idea of Unity of which they are so many adaptations; they are unities as are *Allāh* and His Word, the *Qoran*. Christians cannot lay claim to the idea of Unity with the same right as Moslems; the idea of Redemption is not necessarily linked to the conception of Divine Unity and might be associated with a so-called 'polytheistic' doctrine. As for Divine Unity, although it is theoretically admitted by Christians, it never appears as a 'dynamic' element, and Christian holiness, the perfect participation in the

* The supreme symbol of Islam, the *Ka'bah*, is a square block; it expresses the number four which is the number of stability. The Moslem can create his family with four wives; they represent the substance of the family or the social substance itself, and are withdrawn from public life, where man is by himself a complete unity. The Arab house is planned in accordance with the same idea: it is square, uniform, closed on the outside, ornamented within and opens on to the court.

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Mystical Body of Christ, proceeds but indirectly from this idea. The Christian doctrine, like the Islamic, starts from a theistic idea, but expressly insists on the Trinitarian aspect of the Divinity. God becomes incarnate and redeems the world; the Principle descends into manifestation to re-establish a disturbed equilibrium. According to the Islamic doctrine God affirms Himself by His Unity; He does not become incarnate by virtue of an inner distinction, nor does He redeem the world, He absorbs it through Islam. He does not descend into manifestation; He projects Himself therein, as the sun is projected by its light; and this projection permits humanity to participate in Him.

It happens not infrequently that Moslems, for whom the Qoran is what Christ is for Christians, reproach the latter for not having a book equivalent to the Qoran, that is to say a book to which no other can be compared, at once doctrinal and legislative, and which is written in the actual language of the Revelation. They see in the multiplicity of the Gospels and other New Testament Texts the mark of a division which is aggravated by the fact that these Scriptures have not been preserved in the language spoken by Jesus, but in a non-Semitic language, and have even been translated from the latter into another language equally foreign to the peoples issued from Abraham; indeed these texts can be translated into any foreign language. This confusion is analogous to that which leads Christians to reproach the Prophet for having been a mere mortal. Thus, if in Islam the Qoran is the Divine Word, the latter is represented in Christianity, not by the New Testament, but by the living presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The New Testament only plays the part of a support, just as the Prophet is only a support of the Divine message and not the message itself. The remembrance, the example and the intercession of the Prophet are subordinate to the revealed Book.

Islam is a spiritual, religious and social block;* the Church is

* A block, image of Unity. Unity is simple and consequently indivisible. According to an observation of a former highly placed English official in Egypt: 'Islam cannot be reformed; a reformed Islam would no longer be Islam, it would be something else.'

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not a block but a centre. A lay Christian is by definition a peripheral being; a Moslem, by reason of his priestly function, is everywhere a central being within his own Tradition, and it matters little to him whether or not he is externally severed from the Moslem community; he always remains his own priest and an autonomous unity, at least in relation to matters within the sphere of religion. From this is derived the fundamental conviction of a Moslem. The faith of a Christian is of another nature: it 'attracts' and 'absorbs' the soul rather than 'enfolding' and 'penetrating' it. Regarded from the Moslem point of view, which concerns us here, the Christian is only linked to his Tradition through the sacraments; he is always in the position of being relatively excluded and he maintains at all times a receptive attitude. In the supreme symbol of Christianity, the Cross, its arms branch off indefinitely from the centre while remaining connected with it; the *Ka'bah* on the other hand is reflected as a whole in the least of its parts, each one of which, by its substance and internal cohesion, is identical with the other parts and with the *Ka'bah* itself.

The correspondences between traditional elements which have been noted above do not exclude others which may exist from a different point of view. Thus the analogy between the New Testament and the Qoran remains real in its own order, just as there is a necessary correspondence from a certain point of view between Christ and the Prophet; to deny this would be to maintain that there are resemblances without sufficient cause, therefore meaningless. But the superficial and even syncretic manner in which such correspondences are most often viewed, usually to the disadvantage of one or the other element under comparison, deprive the result of any true value. In reality there are two kinds of traditional correspondences: on the one hand those based on what may be called the phenomenal nature of the elements of the Traditions in question, and on the other hand those derived from the internal structure of those Traditions. In the first case the element will be considered as a person, a book, a rite, an institution or whatever it may be, and in the second case this element will be considered from the point of

view of its particular 'organic' significance for the Tradition. This takes us back to the analogy existing between the spiritual and the physical points of view: according to the latter a given object always remains one and the same object, but it is able to change its aspect and importance according to different perspectives; and this law may readily be transposed to the spiritual sphere.

2

It is important to make it clear that in this chapter we have been exclusively concerned with Traditions as such, that is to say as organisms, and not with their purely spiritual possibilities which are identical in principle. It is obvious that from this point of view any question of preference is excluded; if Islam as a traditional organism is more homogenous and more intimately coherent than the Christian 'form', this is a relatively contingent matter. Likewise the 'solar' nature of Christ cannot confer upon Christianity a superiority over Islam; we will explain the reason for this further on and need only recall here that from a certain standpoint each traditional form is necessarily superior to others belonging to the same order, though only in some particular aspect of its manifestation and not in its essence or spiritual possibilities. To those who would judge the Islamic form on the basis of superficial and necessarily arbitrary comparisons with the Christian form, we would reply that Islam, given that it represents a possible spiritual perspective, is all that it should be to manifest this possibility; and we would say likewise that the Prophet, far from having been merely an imperfect imitator of Christ, was all that he should have been in order to realize the spiritual possibility represented by Islam. If the Prophet is not Christ and if in particular he appears under a more human aspect, it is because the reason for the existence of Islam does not reside in the idea of Christ or of the 'Avatar', but in an idea which necessarily excludes this perspective. The idea thus realized by Islam and the Prophet is that of the Divine Unity, the absolutely transcendent aspect of which implies—

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for the 'created' or 'manifested' world—a corresponding aspect of imperfection. This explains why it has been permissible for Moslems from the very beginning to employ a human means such as war to establish their traditional world, whereas in the case of Christianity several centuries had to elapse after the apostolic times before it became possible to use the same means, which is moreover indispensable for the propagation of a religion. As for the wars engaged in by the Companions of the Prophet, they represented ordeals undergone in view of what might be called the 'elaboration'—or the 'crystallization'—of the formal aspects of a new world. Hatred did not enter in, and the holy men who fought in this manner, far from fighting against individuals and for human interests, did so in the spirit of the teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*; Krishna enjoined upon Arjuna to fight, not out of hatred nor even to conquer, but in order to fulfil his destiny as an instrument of the Divine plan and without attaching himself to the fruits of his actions.

This struggle between 'points of view' at the time of the constitution of a traditional world also reflects the 'rivalry' between possibilities of manifestation at the time of the 'emergence from chaos' which takes place at the origin of a cosmic world, a 'rivalry' which is of course of a purely principial order. It was in the nature of Islam and of its mission that it should from the beginning have placed itself on political ground so far as its outward affirmation was concerned, whereas such an attitude would not only have been entirely contrary to the nature or mission of primitive Christianity, but also completely unrealizable in an environment as solid and stable as that of the Roman Empire. However, once Christianity had become a state religion, it was not merely able but even bound to enter the political arena in exactly the same way as Islam. The outward vicissitudes suffered by Islam after the death of the Prophet are certainly not attributable to a spiritual insufficiency, being simply blemishes inherent in the political realm as such. The fact that Islam was established outwardly by human means had its sole cause in the Divine Will, which ruled out all esoteric interference in the structure of the new traditional form. On the

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other hand, so far as the difference between Christ and the Prophet is concerned, we would add that the great spiritual figures, whatever their respective degrees, manifest either a 'sublimation' or a 'norm'; to the first group belong Buddha and Christ as well as all those saints who were monks or hermits, while to the second belong Abraham, Moses and Mohammed, together with all saints living in the world such as the royal and warrior saints. The attitude of the former corresponds to the words of Christ: 'My Kingdom is not of this world'; the attitude of the latter to the words 'Thy Kingdom come'.

Those who believe it their duty to deny the legitimacy of the Prophet of Islam on moral grounds forget that the only question to be answered is whether or not Mohammed was inspired by God, it being quite irrelevant whether or not he was comparable to Jesus or conformed to some established morality. When one remembers that it was God who allowed polygamy to the Hebrews and commanded Moses to have the population of Canaan put to the sword, it is clear that the question of the 'morality' of such conduct is in no way involved; what alone counts in every case is the fact of the Divine Will, the object of which is invariable but the means or modes of which vary by reason of the Infinity of its Possibility and, secondarily, because of the indefinite diversity of contingencies. Christians readily blame the Prophet for actions such as the destruction of the tribe of the Qoraidha; but they forget that any Prophet of Israel would have acted in a still sterner way than he, and they would do well to recall how Samuel, by the order of God, acted towards the Amalekites and their king. The case of the Qoraidha is also like that of the Pharisees in that it provides an example of the 'discrimination of spirits' which takes place automatically, as it were, upon contact with a manifestation of Light. However 'neutral' an individual may appear so long as he is placed in a 'chaotic' or undifferentiated environment, such as, for example, the Near-Eastern world at the time of Mohammed or indeed any environment in which a traditional readaptation is about to take place, and however attenuated or obscured the fundamental tendency of the individual may

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appear in an environment of spiritual indifference such as we have just described, this tendency will spontaneously be actualized when faced with the alternative presented upon contact with the Light; and this explains why it is that when the gates of Heaven are opened by the lightning flash of the Revelation, the gates of Hell open too, just as in the sensory world a light also projects a shadow.

If Mohammed had been a false prophet, there is no reason why Christ should not have spoken of him as he spoke of Antichrist; but if Mohammed is a true Prophet, the passages referring to the Paraclete must inevitably concern him—not exclusively but ‘eminently’—for it is inconceivable that Christ, when speaking of the future, should have passed over in silence a manifestation of such magnitude. The same reasoning excludes *a priori* the possibility that Christ, when making his predictions, intended to include Mohammed under the general denomination of ‘false prophets’, for in the history of our era Mohammed is in no sense a typical example among others of the same kind, but on the contrary a unique and incomparable apparition.* If

* ‘If greatness of design, economy of means and immensity of achievement are the three measures of the genius of man, who will dare, on the human plane, to compare any of the great men of modern history with Mahomet? The most famous of them have done no more than stir up arms, laws and empires; when they have founded anything, they have founded only material powers which often have crumbled before them. Mahomet stirred up armies, legislatures, empires, peoples, dynasties, millions of men over a third of the inhabited globe; but further, he stirred up ideas, beliefs and souls. Upon a book, each letter of which has become law, he has founded a spiritual nationality which embraces peoples of every language and every race, and as the indelible characteristic of this Moslem nationality he has impressed upon it hatred of false gods and love of the one and immaterial God.’ (Lamartine, *Histoire de la Turquie*).

‘The Arab conquest, which flooded simultaneously both Europe and Asia, is without precedent; the rapidity of its successes can only be compared with the rapidity of the establishment of the Mongol Empires of Attila, Genghis Khan or Tamerlane. But these were as ephemeral as the Islamic conquest was durable. This religion still has followers to-day in almost all the countries where it was imposed under the first Caliphs. The lightning speed of its diffusion is truly miraculous when compared with the slow progress of Christianity.’ (H. Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*).

‘Force had no part in the propagation of the Quran, for the Arabs always

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he had been one of the false prophets announced by Christ, he would have been followed by others, and there would exist in our days a multitude of false religions subsequent to Christ and comparable in importance and extension to Islam. The spirituality to be found within Islam from its origins up to our days is an incontestable fact, and 'by their fruits ye will know them'. Moreover it will be recalled that the Prophet in his doctrine has testified to the second coming of Christ without attributing to himself any glory, unless it be that of being the last Prophet of the cycle; and history proves that he spoke the truth, no comparable manifestation having followed after him.

Finally it is indispensable to say a few words concerning the Islamic attitude towards sexuality. If Moslem morality differs from the Christian—which is not the case in regard to either holy war or slavery, but solely in regard to polygamy and divorce*—this is because it derives from a different aspect of

left those they conquered free to keep their religion. If Christian peoples became converted to the religion of their vanquishers, it was because the new conquerors showed themselves juster than their former masters and because their religion was of a greater simplicity than that taught to them up to that moment. . . . Far from being imposed by force, the Qoran was spread only by persuasion. . . . Persuasion alone could induce peoples who conquered the Arabs at a later date, such as the Turks and the Mongols, to adopt it. In India, where the Arabs in reality but passed through, the Qoran is so widely diffused that it can count to-day (1884) more than fifty million adherents. Their number increases each day. . . . The diffusion of the Qoran in China has been no less wide. Although the Arabs have never conquered the smallest part of the Heavenly Empire, there exists therein to-day a Moslem population of more than twenty millions.' (G. le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes*).

* Polygamy was necessary for the peoples of the Middle East—who are warrior peoples—to ensure that all the women should be provided for notwithstanding the killing off of the men in the wars; a further reason is the high mortality among infants, which made polygamy virtually necessary for the preservation of the race. As for divorce, it was, and is, made necessary by the inevitable separation of the sexes, which results in the bride and bridegroom not knowing one another, or hardly knowing one another, before marriage; this separation is itself made necessary by the sensual temperament of the Arabs and of southern peoples in general. What we have just said explains the wearing of the veil by Moslem women and also the *pardah* of high-caste Hindu women. The fact that the veil is only worn in the latest traditional form, namely Islam, and that the *pardah* is a comparatively recent introduction into Hinduism, shows that the need for these measures arises

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the total Truth. Christianity, like Buddhism, considers only the carnal side of sexuality, therefore its 'substantial' or 'quantitative' aspect. Islam on the other hand, like Judaism and the Hindu and Chinese Traditions—apart from certain spiritual ways which reject sexual love for reasons of method—considers the 'essential' or 'qualitative' aspect of sexuality, or what we might call its 'cosmic' aspect; and in fact the sanctification of sexuality confers upon it a 'quality' which transcends its carnal aspect and neutralizes or even abolishes the latter in certain cases, for instance in the case of the Cassandras and Sybils of antiquity or of the Tantric *Shri Chakra*, or lastly in that of great spiritual figures such as Solomon and Mohammed. In other words sexuality can have a 'noble' as well as an 'impure' aspect; to speak in terms of geometric symbolism it may be considered in a 'vertical' as well as a 'horizontal' sense; the flesh is 'impure' in itself, with or without sexuality, and the latter is 'noble' in itself, in or out of the flesh. This 'nobility' of sexuality derives from its Divine Prototype, for 'God is Love'. In Islamic terms one would say that 'God is Unity', and that love, being a mode of union (*tawhīd*) is for that reason a way of conforming to the Divine Nature. Love can sanctify the flesh, just as the flesh can debase Love. Islam insists on the first of these truths, while Christianity tends to insist on the second, except of course in the sacrament of marriage in which it unavoidably and as it were incidentally rejoins the Judaeo-Islamic perspective.

3

Our next task is to show wherein really lies the difference between the respective manifestations of Christ and Mohammed. It must, however, be emphasized that differences of this kind concern only the 'manifestation' of 'God-Men' and not their inward and Divine reality, which is identical. Meister Eckhardt

out of conditions that are particular to the end of the 'Iron Age'. It is owing to the existence of these same conditions that women have been excluded from certain Brahmanic rites to which they formerly had access.

has expressed this identity in the following terms: 'Everything that the Holy Scriptures say about Christ is equally true of every good and divine man', that is to say of every man who possesses the plenitude of spiritual realization, both in the sense of 'expansion' and of 'exaltation'. Again Shri Ramakrishna says: 'In the Absolute I am not, and thou art not, and God is not, for It is beyond speech and thought. But so long as anything exists outside myself, I ought to adore Brahma, within the limits of the mind, as something existing outside myself'; this explains, on the one hand, how it was that Christ could pray, though being himself Divine, and, on the other hand, how it was possible for the Prophet, whilst unmistakably 'man' by reason of the particular mode of his manifestation, to be at the same time Divine in his 'inward' reality. In the same order of ideas, we would also point out that the religious perspective is based essentially upon a 'fact' to which it attributes a character of absoluteness. For example, the Christian perspective is based upon the supreme spiritual state realized by Christ and inaccessible to mystic individualism, but it attributes this state to Christ alone, whence the denial, at least in ordinary theology, of metaphysical 'Deliverance' or the 'Beatific Vision' in this life. It should be added that esotericism, speaking through the voice of Meister Eckhardt, brings back the mystery of the Incarnation within the sphere of spiritual laws when it attributes to the man who has attained the highest sanctity all the characteristics of Christ with the exception of the 'prophetic' or rather 'redemptive' mission. An analogous example is provided by the claim made by several Sufis that certain of their writings are on the same level of inspiration as the Qoran. In exoteric Islam, this degree of inspiration is attributed to the Prophet alone, in conformity with the specifically religious perspective which is always founded on a 'transcendent fact' appropriated exclusively on behalf of a particular manifestation of the Word.

We have previously mentioned the fact that it is the Qoran which in all strictness corresponds to the Christ-Eucharist, and which represents the great manifestation of Paraclete, the 'descent' (*tanzīl*) of the Holy Ghost (*Er-Rūh*, called also *Jibrīl*

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in relation to its function as Revealer). It follows that the function of the Prophet is from this point of view analogous and symbolically even identical to that of the Holy Virgin, who was likewise the 'ground' for the reception of the Word. Just as the Holy Virgin, fertilized by the Holy Ghost, is 'Co-Redemptress' and 'Queen of Heaven', created before the rest of the Creation, so the Prophet, inspired by the same Paracletic Spirit, is 'Messenger of Mercy' (*Rasūl Er-Rahmah*) and 'Lord of the two existences' (the 'here' and the 'beyond') (*Seyid el-kawnayn*), and he likewise was created before all other beings. This 'priority of creation' signifies that the Virgin and the Prophet 'incarnate' a principal or 'metacosmic' Reality;* they are identified—in their receptive function, though not in their Divine Knowledge, nor, in the case of Mohammed, in his prophetic function—with the passive aspect of universal Existence (*Prakriti*, in Arabic *El-Lawh el-mahfūzh*, 'the Guarded Tablet'), and it is for this reason that the Virgin is 'immaculate' and, from the merely physical standpoint, 'virgin', while the Prophet, like the Apostles, is 'illiterate' (*ummī*), that is to say 'pure' from the 'taint' of human knowledge, or knowledge humanly acquired. This 'purity' is the first condition for the reception of the Paracletic Gift, just as in the spiritual sphere 'chastity', 'poverty', 'humility' and other forms of simplicity or unity are indispensable for the reception of the Divine Light. As a further illustration of this analogical relationship between the Virgin and the Prophet, it may be added that the symptoms manifested by the latter at the time of the Revelation are directly comparable to those of the Virgin when carrying or giving birth to the Infant

* The opinion that Christ was the *Mleccha-Avatāra*, the 'Divine descent of the Barbarians' (or 'for the Barbarians'), that is to say the ninth incarnation of *Vishnu*, must be rejected for reasons both of traditional fact and of principle. In the first place the Buddha has always been considered by Hindus as an *Avatāra*, though since Hinduism had necessarily to exclude Buddhism, the apparent Buddhist heresy was explained on the one hand by the need to abolish blood sacrifices, and on the other hand by the need to involve corrupted men in error in order to hasten the inevitable advance of the *Kali-yuga*. In the second place, it is impossible that a being having an 'organic' place in the Hindu system should belong to a world other than India, particularly one as remote as the Jewish world.

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Jesus. However by reason of his prophetic function, in the highest meaning of the term, Mohammed is also more than the Virgin, and when he utters the Qoranic surahs, or more generally whenever the 'Divine Ego' speaks through his mouth, he is directly identified with the Christ, who is Himself what the Revelation is for the Prophet and whose every word is consequently Divine Speech. In the case of the Prophet, only the 'words of the Most Holy' (*ahādīth quddūsiyah*) possess, apart from the Qoran, this Divine character; his other words proceed from a subordinate degree of inspiration (*nafath Er-Rūh*, the Hindu *Smṛiti*), as do also certain parts of the New Testament, in particular the Epistles. To return to the 'purity' of the Prophet, we also find in his case the exact equivalent of the 'Immaculate Conception'; according to the traditional account two angels cleft open the chest of the infant Mohammed and cleansed him with snow of his 'original sin', which appeared in the form of a black stain on his heart. Mohammed, like Mary and the 'human nature' of Jesus, is not therefore an ordinary man, and it is for this reason that it is said that 'Mohammed is (simply) a man, not as (ordinary) men are, but in the manner of a jewel among (common) stones' (*Muhammadun basharun lā kal-bashari bal hua kal-yaqūti baynal-hajar*). This brings to mind the formula of the Ave Maria: 'Blessed art thou among women', which indicates that the Virgin, in herself and apart from her reception of the Holy Ghost, is a 'jewel' compared with other creatures, thus a sort of 'sublime norm'.

In a certain respect the Virgin and the Prophet 'incarnate' the passive or 'feminine' aspect—or pole—of universal Existence (*Prakṛiti*);* they therefore 'incarnate' *a fortiori* the beneficent and merciful aspect of *Prakṛiti*, namely *Lakshmi* (the *Kwan-Yin* of the Far-Eastern Tradition), and this explains their essential function as 'intercessors' and accounts for names such as 'Mother of Mercy' (*Mater Misericordiae*) and 'Our Lady of Perpetual Help' (*Nostra Domina a perpetuo succursu*), as well as the names given to the Prophet such as 'Key to God's Mercy'

* Concerning questions of Hindu metaphysic we refer the reader to *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedānta*, by René Guénon (Luzac).

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(*Miftāh Rahmat Allāh*), 'Merciful' (*Rahīm*), 'Healer' (*Shafī*), 'Remover of Grief' (*Kāshif el-kurab*), 'Effacer of sins' ('*Afuww*) and 'Most beautiful Creation of God' (*Ajmalu khalq Allāh*). If it be asked what relationship exists between this 'mercy', this 'pardon' or this 'beneficence' and universal Existence, we would reply as follows: since Existence is 'undifferentiated', 'virgin' or 'pure' in relation to its productions, it is able to reabsorb in its undifferentiation the differentiated qualities of things; in other words the disequilibriums of manifestation are always capable of being integrated in the principal equilibrium. Now all 'evil' comes from a cosmic quality (*guna*), hence from a rupture of equilibrium, and since Existence carries all the qualities within itself in undifferentiated equilibrium, it is capable of dissolving in its 'infinity' all the vicissitudes of the world. Existence is in reality both 'Virgin' and 'Mother', in the sense that, on the one hand, it is determined by nothing apart from God, and on the other hand, it gives birth to the manifested Universe. Mary is 'Virgin-Mother' by reason of the mystery of the Incarnation; as for Mohammed, he is, as we have seen, 'virgin' or 'illiterate' in so far as he is inspired only by God and receives nothing from men, and he is 'Mother' by reason of his power of intercession with God; the personifications of the Divine *Prakriti*, whether human or angelic, essentially reveal the aspects of purity and love. The aspect of Grace or Mercy belonging to the 'virginal' and 'maternal' Divinity also explains why the latter readily manifests itself in a sensible form and in human guise, thereby becoming 'accessible' to men: the appearances of the Virgin are well known in the West, and in the case of the Prophet his appearances to Moslem saints are frequent and as it were 'normal'; there even exist methods for obtaining this grace, which is equivalent in reality to a 'concretization' of the 'Beatific Vision'.*

* In this connection we may also recall the appearances of the *Shakti* in Hinduism—for example to Shri Ramakrishna and Shri Sarada Devi—and the appearances of *Kwan-Yin* or Kwannon in the Traditions of the Far-East, for example to Shonin Shinran, the great Japanese Buddhist Saint; it is also known that in Judaism the *Shekinah* appears in the form of a beautiful and gracious woman.

Although the Prophet does not occupy in Islam the same place that Christ occupies in Christianity, he nevertheless enjoys of necessity a central position in the Islamic perspective. It remains for us to explain why this should be so and also to show how Islam integrates Christ in its perspective while at the same time recognizing his 'solar' nature as reflected in his virginal birth. According to this perspective, the Word does not manifest itself in any particular man as such, but in the Prophetic function—in the highest sense of the term—and above all in the revealed Books; and since the Prophetic function of Mohammed is real and the Quran a true Revelation, Moslems, who admit only these two criteria, see no reason for placing Jesus before Mohammed. Indeed there is every reason for them to give precedence to Mohammed, inasmuch as the latter, being the last representative of the Prophetic function, recapitulates and synthesizes every aspect of this function and closes the cycle of manifestation of the Word, whence the title 'Seal of the Prophets' (*Khātam el-anbiyā*). It is this unique situation that confers upon Mohammed the 'central' position which he enjoys in Islam and that allows of the Word itself being named 'Mohammedan Light' (*Nūr Muhammadiyāh*).

The fact that the Islamic perspective is concerned only with Revelation as such, and not with all its possible modes, explains why Islam does not attach the same importance as Christianity to the miracles of Christ. In point of fact, all the 'Messengers', including Mohammed, have performed miracles (*mu'jizāt*);* the difference in this respect between Christ and the other 'Messengers' is that only in the case of Christ does the miracle possess a 'central' importance, being wrought by God

* The majority of orientalists, if not all, falsely deduce from various passages in the Quran that the Prophet accomplished no miracles, a deduction which is contradicted in advance, not only by the traditional commentators of the Quran, but also by the *Sunnah* which is the pillar of Islamic orthodoxy.

With regard to the 'avatic' nature of the Prophet, without mentioning infallible criteria of a more profound order, it is witnessed by the signs which according to the *Sunnah* preceded and accompanied his birth, signs which are analogous to those associated with Christ and Buddha in the Christian and Buddhist Traditions.

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'in' the human support and not merely 'through' this support. This part played by the miracle in Christianity is explained by the particular features which constitute the reason for the existence of this form of Revelation, the nature of which will be examined in the following chapter. From the Islamic point of view it is not the miracles that matter so much as the Divine nature of the 'Messenger's' mission, irrespective of how important miracles may be in that mission. It might be said that the particularity of Christianity consists in the fact that it is based first and foremost on a miracle, which is perpetuated in the Eucharist, whereas Islam is essentially based on an Idea, supported by human means though with Divine aid, and perpetuated in the Qoranic Revelation of which the ritual prayer is as it were a ceaselessly renewed actualization.

We have already let it be understood that in his inner reality, Mohammed, like Christ, is identified with the Word, as indeed, outside the specifically religious perspective, is every being who has achieved metaphysical realization in its fullness;* whence the following *ahādīth*; 'He who has seen me has seen God (under His aspect of absolute Truth)' (*Man ra'ānī faqad ra'āl-Haqq*), and 'He (Mohammed) was prophet (Word) when Adam was still between water and mud' (*Fakāna nabiyyen wa Adamu baynal mā'i wat-tīn*), words that can be compared with these words of Christ: 'I and my Father are one', and 'Verily I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am'.

* This metaphysical realization, which integrates man in his Divine Prototype, so that one may say of the being possessing this supreme 'state' that 'he is not created' (*Es-Sūfi lam yukhlaq*), is hardly within anybody's reach in our cyclic period; if we speak of it nevertheless, it is solely out of regard for doctrinal truth, for without the idea of the 'God-Man', esotericism would be deprived of an aspect of its very essence.

Chapter VIII

UNIVERSALITY AND PARTICULAR
NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN
TRADITION

I

What, for want of a better term, we have been obliged to call 'Christian exotericism' is not, in its origin and structure, strictly analogous to the Jewish and Islamic exotericisms; for whereas the exoteric side of the two latter Traditions was instituted as such from the very beginning, in the sense that it formed part of the Revelation and was clearly distinguishable from its esoteric aspect, what we now know as Christian exotericism hardly figured as such in the Christian Revelation except in a purely incidental manner. It is true that in some of the oldest New Testament texts, particularly those of Saint Paul, there are suggestions of a point of view that may be termed religious in the proper sense of the word, were it only by reason of the employment of a religious symbolism. Such is the case, for example, when the principal hierarchic connection existing between esotericism and exotericism is represented in the guise of a sort of historical relationship between the New Covenant and the Old, the former being identified with the 'spirit that giveth life', and the latter with the 'letter that killeth'* a comparison which leaves out of account

* The interpretation of these words in an exoteric sense is really an act of suicide, for they are bound inevitably to turn against the exotericism which has annexed them. The truth of this was demonstrated by the Reformation, which eagerly seized upon the phrase in question (2 Cor. iii. 6) in order to

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the integral reality inherent in the Old Covenant itself, namely that element in it which is identified principally with the New Covenant, the latter being simply a new form or adaptation of that same reality. This is a good example of how the religious point of view*, instead of embracing a truth in its entirety, selects one aspect only as a matter of expediency and purports to give it an exclusive and absolute value; it should not be forgotten, however, that but for this dogmatic character religious truth would be inefficacious with regard to the particular end imposed upon it by the motives of expediency already mentioned. There is thus a two-fold restriction put upon pure truth; on the one hand an aspect of the truth is invested with the character of integral truth, and on the other hand an absolute character is attributed to the relative. Furthermore this standpoint of expediency carries with it the negation of all those things which, being neither accessible nor indispensable to everyone indiscriminately, lie for that reason beyond the purview of the religious perspective and must be left outside it—hence the simplifications and symbolical syntheses peculiar to every religious doctrine.† Lastly, we may also mention, as a

make of it one of its chief weapons, thus usurping the place which normally should belong to esotericism; the earlier denial of the latter on the occasion of the destruction of the Order of the Temple was inevitably destined to lead to a replacement 'from below', that is to say to heresy.

* Christianity inherited the specifically religious point of view from Judaism, the form of which coincides with the origin of this point of view; it is almost superfluous to stress the fact that its presence in primitive Christianity in no wise invalidates the initiatory essence of the latter. 'There exist'—says Origen—'diverse forms of the Word under which It reveals Itself to Its disciples, conforming Itself to the degree of light of each one, according to the degree of their progress in saintliness' (*Contra Cels.* iv. 16).

† Thus, the religious doctrines deny the transmigration of the soul and consequently the existence of an immortal soul in animals; and they also deny the total cyclic dissolution which the Hindus call *mahā-pralaya*, a dissolution which implies the annihilation of the entire Creation (*samsāra*). These truths are in no wise indispensable for salvation and even involve certain dangers for the mentalities to which the religious doctrines are addressed; in other words, an exotericism is always obliged to pass over in silence any esoteric elements which are incompatible with its own dogmatic form, or even to deny them.

However, in order to forestall possible objections to the examples just

particularly striking feature of these doctrines, the identification of historical facts with principal truths and the inevitable confusions resulting therefrom. For example, when it is said that all human souls, from that of Adam to the departed souls of Christ's own contemporaries, must await His descent into Hell in order to deliver them, such a statement confuses the historical with the cosmic Christ and represents an eternal function of the Word as a temporal fact, for the simple reason that Jesus was a manifestation of this Word; which is another way of saying that in the world where this manifestation took place, Jesus was truly the unique incarnation of the Word. Another example may be found in the divergent views of Christianity and Islam on the subject of the death of Christ: apart from the fact that the Qoran, by its apparent denial of Christ's death, is simply affirming that Christ was not killed in reality—which is obvious not only as regards the Divine nature of the God-Man, but also as regards His human nature, since it was resurrected—the refusal of Moslems to admit the historical Redemption, and consequently the facts that are the unique terrestrial expression of Universal Redemption as far as Christian humanity is concerned, simply denotes that in the final analysis Christ did not die for those who are 'whole', who in this case are the Moslems in so far as they benefit from another terrestrial form of the One and Eternal Redemption. In other words, if it be true in prin-

given, two reservations require to be made. In the first place, with regard to the immortality of the soul as applied to animals, it should be said that the religious denial is justified in the sense that a being cannot in fact attain immortality while bound to the animal state, since the latter, like the vegetable and mineral states, is 'peripheral', and immortality and deliverance can only be attained from the starting point of a 'central' state such as the human one. It will be seen from this example that a religious negation which is dogmatic in character is never entirely senseless. In the second place, with regard to the refusal to admit the *Mahā-pralaya*, it should be added that this negation is not strictly dogmatic and that the total cyclic dissolution, which completes a 'life of *Brahmā*', is clearly attested by scriptural passages such as the following: 'For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matt. v. 18.) 'They shall remain there (*khiālidn*) for as long as the heavens and the earth endure, unless thy Lord willeth otherwise.' (Qoran, xi. 107).

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ciple that Christ died for all men—in the same way that the Islamic Revelation is principally addressed to everyone—in fact He died only for those who must and do benefit from the means of grace that perpetuate His work of Redemption;* hence the traditional distance separating Islam from the Christian Mystery is bound, outwardly at least, to appear in the form of a denial, exactly in the same way that Christian exoterism must deny the possibility of salvation outside the Redemption brought about by Jesus. However that may be, although a religious perspective may be contested *ad extra*, that is to say in the light of another religious perspective deriving from a different aspect of the same truth, it remains incontestable *ad intra*, inasmuch as its capacity to serve as a means of expressing the total truth makes of it a key to the latter. Moreover it must never be forgotten that the restrictions inherent in the religious point of view express in their own way the Divine Goodness which wishes to prevent men from going astray, and which gives them what is accessible and indispensable to everyone,

* In the same order of ideas, we may quote the following words of Saint Augustine: 'That which to-day is called Christian religion existed among the Ancients and has never ceased to exist from the origin of the human race until the time when Christ Himself came and men began to call Christian the true religion which already existed beforehand.' (*Retract.* I, xiii. 3). This passage has been commented upon as follows by the Abbé P-J. Jallabert in his book *Le Catholicisme avant Jésus-Christ*: 'The Catholic religion is but a continuation of the primitive religion restored and generously enriched by him who knew its work from the beginning. This explains why St. Paul the Apostle did not claim to be superior to the Gentiles save in his knowledge of Jesus crucified. In fact, all the Gentiles needed to acquire was the knowledge of the Incarnation and the Redemption considered as an accomplished fact; for they had already received the deposit of all the remaining truths. . . . It is well to consider that this Divine revelation, which idolatry had rendered unrecognizable, had nevertheless been preserved in its purity and perhaps in all its perfection in the mysteries of Eleusis, Lemnos and Samothrace.' This 'knowledge of the Incarnation and the Redemption' implies before all else a knowledge of the renewal effected by Christ of a means of grace which in itself is eternal, like the Law which Christ came to fulfil but not to destroy. This means of grace is essentially always the same and the only means that exists, however its modes may vary in accordance with the different ethnical and cultural environments to which it reveals itself; the Eucharist is a universal reality like Christ Himself.

particularly striking feature of these doctrines, the identification of historical facts with principial truths and the inevitable confusions resulting therefrom. For example, when it is said that all human souls, from that of Adam to the departed souls of Christ's own contemporaries, must await His descent into Hell in order to deliver them, such a statement confuses the historical with the cosmic Christ and represents an eternal function of the Word as a temporal fact, for the simple reason that Jesus was a manifestation of this Word; which is another way of saying that in the world where this manifestation took place, Jesus was truly the unique incarnation of the Word. Another example may be found in the divergent views of Christianity and Islam on the subject of the death of Christ: apart from the fact that the Qoran, by its apparent denial of Christ's death, is simply affirming that Christ was not killed in reality—which is obvious not only as regards the Divine nature of the God-Man, but also as regards His human nature, since it was resurrected—the refusal of Moslems to admit the historical Redemption, and consequently the facts that are the unique terrestrial expression of Universal Redemption as far as Christian humanity is concerned, simply denotes that in the final analysis Christ did not die for those who are 'whole', who in this case are the Moslems in so far as they benefit from another terrestrial form of the One and Eternal Redemption. In other words, if it be true in prin-

given, two reservations require to be made. In the first place, with regard to the immortality of the soul as applied to animals, it should be said that the religious denial is justified in the sense that a being cannot in fact attain immortality while bound to the animal state, since the latter, like the vegetable and mineral states, is 'peripheral', and immortality and deliverance can only be attained from the starting point of a 'central' state such as the human one. It will be seen from this example that a religious negation which is dogmatic in character is never entirely senseless. In the second place, with regard to the refusal to admit the *Mahā-pralaya*, it should be added that this negation is not strictly dogmatic and that the total cyclic dissolution, which completes a 'life of *Brahmā*', is clearly attested by scriptural passages such as the following: 'For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matt. v. 18.) 'They shall remain there (*khālidn*) for as long as the heavens and the earth endure, unless thy Lord willeth otherwise.' (Qoran, xi. 107).

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having regard to the mental predispositions of the human collectivity concerned.*

It will be understood from what has just been said that any seeming contradiction or depreciation of the Mosaic Law that may be found in the words of Christ or the teaching of the Apostles is in reality but an expression of the superiority of esotericism over exotericism† and does not therefore apply at the same level as this Law,‡ at least not *a priori*, that is to say so long as this hierarchic relationship is not itself conceived in religious mode. It is perfectly obvious that the main teachings of Christ transcend the religious viewpoint and that is indeed the reason

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† This is brought out in a particularly clear manner by the words of Christ concerning St. John the Baptist. From a religious point of view, it is obvious that the Prophet who stands nearest to the Christ-God is the greatest among men, and on the other hand that the least among the Blessed in Heaven is greater than the greatest man on earth, always by reason of this same proximity to God. Metaphysically, the words of Christ express the superiority of what is principal over what is manifested, or, from an initiatory point of view, of esotericism over exotericism, St. John the Baptist being in this case regarded as the summit and fulfilment of the latter, which explains furthermore why his name is identical with that of St. John the Evangelist who represents Christianity in its most inward aspect.

‡ In St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, one finds the following passage: 'For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcised keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God (Rom. ii. 25-9).

The same idea re-appears, in a more concise form, in the following passage from the Qoran: 'And they say: Become Jews or Nazarenes in order that you may be guided; answer: No, we follow the way of Abraham who was pure (or 'primordial', *hanīf*) and who was not one of those who associate (creatures with *Allāh*, or effects with the Cause, or manifestations with the Principle). (Receive) the baptism of *Allāh* (and not that of men); and who indeed baptises better than *Allāh*? and it is Him whom we adore' (*sūrat el-Baqarah* 135 and 138). The 'baptism' referred to here expresses the same fundamental idea that St. Paul expresses by the word 'circumcision'.

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for their existence. They therefore likewise transcend the Law; in no other way could one explain the attitude of Christ with respect to the law of retaliation, or with regard to the woman taken in adultery and to divorce. In fact the turning of the other cheek is not a thing that any social collectivity could put into practice with a view to maintaining its equilibrium,* and it has no meaning except as a spiritual attitude; the spiritual man alone firmly takes his stand outside the logical chain of individual reactions, since for him a participation in the current of these reactions is tantamount to a fall from grace, at least when such participation involves the centre or the soul of the individual, though not when it remains purely an outward and impersonal act of justice such as that envisaged by the Mosaic Law. But it was precisely because this impersonal character of the law of retaliation had been lost and replaced by passions that it was needful for Christ to express a spiritual truth which, although only condemning a false pretention, appeared to condemn the Law itself. All this is clearly evidenced in Christ's answer to those who wished to stone the woman taken in adultery, and who, instead of acting impersonally in the name of the Law, would have acted personally in the name of their own hypocrisy. Christ did not therefore speak from the standpoint of the Law, but from that of inward, supra-social and spiritual realities; and His point of view was exactly the same on the question of divorce. Perhaps the most striking proof to be found in Christ's teachings of the purely spiritual and therefore supra-

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There is a *hadith* which shows the compatibility existing between the spiritual point of view affirmed by Christ and the social point of view which is that of the Mosaic Law. It is related that the first thief among the Moslem community was led before the Prophet in order that his hand might be cut off according to the Qoranic law; but the Prophet turned pale. He was asked 'Hast thou some objection?' He answered: 'How should I have nothing to object to! Must I be the ally of Satan in enmity against my brothers? If you wish God to forgive your sin and conceal it, you also must conceal the sin of others. For when once the transgressor has been brought before the monarch, the chastisement must be accomplished.'

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social and extra-moral character of His Doctrine, is contained in the following saying: 'If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' (Luke xiv. 26.) It is clearly impossible to oppose such teaching to the Mosaic Law.

As a religion Christianity accordingly possesses none of the 'normal' characteristics of an exotericism instituted as such, but presents itself as an exotericism in point of 'fact' rather than one existing in 'principle'. Moreover, even without referring to Scriptural passages, the essentially initiatory character of Christianity is apparent from certain features of the first importance, such as the Doctrine of the Trinity, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and, more particularly, the use of wine in this rite, or again, from the use of purely esoteric expressions such as 'Son of God' and especially 'Mother of God'. If exotericism is 'something that is at the same time indispensable and accessible to all',* Christianity cannot be exoteric in the usual sense of the word, since it is in reality by no means accessible to everyone, although in fact, by virtue of its religious application, it is imposed on everyone. This inaccessibility of the Christian dogmas is expressed by calling them 'mysteries', a word which has a positive meaning only in the initiatory domain to which moreover it belongs, but which, when applied in the religious sphere, seems to attempt to justify or conceal the fact that Christian dogmas carry with them no 'direct' intellectual proof. For example, the Divine Unity is a truth that is immediately evident and therefore capable of exoteric or dogmatic formulation, for this idea, in its simplest expression, is one that is accessible to every man whose mind is sound; on the other hand, the Trinity, inasmuch as it corresponds to a more differentiated point of view and represents a particular development of the Doctrine of Unity among others that are equally possible, is not strictly speaking capable of exoteric formulation, for the simple reason that a 'differentiated' or 'derived' metaphysical conception is

* Definition given by René Guénon in his article '*Création et Manifestation*' (*Études Traditionnelles*, Oct. 1937).

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not accessible to everyone. Moreover, the Trinity necessarily corresponds to a more relative point of view than that of Unity, in the same way that 'Redemption' is a reality more relative than 'Creation'. Any normal man can to a certain extent conceive the Divine Unity, because this is the most universal and therefore in a certain sense the most simple aspect of Divinity; on the other hand, the Trinity can only be understood by those who are capable of conceiving the Divinity under other more or less relative aspects, that is to say by those who are able, through spiritual participation in the Divine Intellect, to 'move', as it were, in the 'metaphysical dimension'; but that, precisely, is a possibility which is very far from being accessible to everyone, at least in the present state of humanity upon this earth. When Saint Augustine said that the Trinity was incomprehensible, he was necessarily speaking—doubtless in conformity with the tendencies of the Roman world—from the rational point of view of the individual, a point of view which, when applied to transcendent truths, can but reveal its own inadequacy. The only thing that is completely incomprehensible, from the standpoint of pure intellectuality, is that which is totally unreal, in other words pure nothingness, which is the same thing as impossibility, and which, being nothing, cannot become an object of understanding. Let it be added that the esoteric nature of the Christian dogmas and sacraments is the underlying cause of the Islamic reaction against Christianity. Because the latter had mixed together the *haqīqah* (the esoteric Truth) and the *sharī'ah* (the exoteric Law), it carried with it certain dangers of disequilibrium which have in fact manifested themselves during the course of the centuries, indirectly contributing to the terrible subversion represented by the modern world, in conformity with the words of Christ: 'Give not that which is Holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.'

Since Christianity seems to confuse two domains that should normally remain separate, just as it confuses the two Eucharistic species which respectively represent these domains, it may be asked whether things might have been otherwise and whether this confusion is simply the result of individual errors. Assuredly not and for the following reasons. The 'inward' and esoteric truth must of necessity sometimes manifest itself in broad daylight, this being by virtue of a definite possibility of spiritual manifestation, and without regard to the shortcomings of a particular human environment; in other words the 'confusion' in question* is but the negative consequence of something which in itself is positive, namely, the manifestation of Christ as such. It is to this manifestation as well as to all other analogous manifestations of the Word, whatever their degree of universality, that the following inspired words relate: 'And the Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.' It was necessary that Christ, by metaphysical or cosmological definition as it were, should break the shell represented by the Mosaic Law, though without denying the latter; being Himself the living kernel of this Law, He had every right to do so, for He was 'more true' than it, and this is one of the meanings of His words, 'Before Abraham was, I am'. It may also be said that if esotericism does not concern everyone, it is for the reason, analogically speaking, that light penetrates some substances and not others; but on the other hand if esotericism must manifest itself openly from time to time, as happened in the case of

* The most general example of this 'confusion' which might also be called a 'fluctuation' is the mingling in the Scriptures of the New Testament of the two degrees of inspiration which Hindus denote respectively by the terms *Shruti* and *Smriti*, and Moslems by the terms *Nafath Er-Rûh* and *ilqâ Er-Rahmâniyah*: the latter expression, like the word *Smriti*, denotes a derived or secondary inspiration, while the first expression, like the word *Shruti*, refers to Revelation properly so-called, that is to say, to the divine Word in a direct sense. In the Epistles, this mingling even appears explicitly on several occasions; the seventh chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians is particularly instructive in this respect.

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Christ, and, at a lower level of universality, in the case of El-Hallaj, it is, still by analogy, because the sun illuminates everything without distinction. Thus, if the 'Light shineth in darkness', in the principal or universal sense we are concerned with here, this is because in so doing it manifests one of its possibilities, and a possibility, by definition, is something that cannot not be, being an aspect of the absolute necessity of the Divine Principle.

These metaphysical considerations must not lead us to overlook a complementary though more contingent aspect of the question. There must also exist on the human side, that is to say in the environment in which such a Divine manifestation is produced, a sufficient reason for its production; so, for the world to which Christ's mission was addressed, this unveiled manifestation of truths which should normally remain hidden—under certain conditions of time and place at least—was the only possible means of bringing about the re-orientation of which that world had need. This is sufficient to justify an aspect of the spiritual radiation of Christ, as we have defined it, which would be abnormal and illegitimate under more ordinary circumstances. This laying bare of the 'spirit' hidden in the 'letter' could not, however, entirely do away with certain laws that are inherent in all esotericism, under pain of changing the nature of the latter entirely: thus, Christ spoke only in parables, 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.' (Matt. xiii. 34, 35.) Despite this fact, however, a radiation of this nature, though inevitable in the particular case in question, nevertheless constitutes 'a double-edged weapon', if one may use such an expression here. But there is another thing to be considered, namely that the Christian way is essentially a 'way of Grace', being in this respect analogous to the 'bhaktic' ways of India and certain ways to be found in Buddhism. In methods like these, by reason of their very nature, the distinction between an 'outer' and an 'inner' aspect is attenuated and sometimes even 'ignored', in the sense that 'Grace', which is initia-

tory in its kernel or essence, tends to 'bestow' itself in the largest measure possible, which it is enabled to do by virtue of the simplicity and universality of the symbolism and means proper to it. It may also be said that while the difference separating the 'way of merit' from the 'way of Knowledge' is of necessity very great, in view of the fact that these two ways refer respectively to meritorious action and intellectual contemplation, the 'way of Grace' occupies in a certain sense a position midway between the two. Thus, in the 'way of Grace' the 'inward' and 'outward' applications go hand in hand in the same radiation of 'Mercy', while in the sphere of spiritual realization the differences will be of degree rather than of principle; every intelligence and every will is able to participate in one and the same 'Grace' according to the measure of its possibilities, in the same way that the sun illuminates everything without distinction, while acting differently on different substances.

Now apart from the fact that a synthetic mode of radiation such as that just described—with its laying bare of things a normal exotericism will keep under a veil—was the only possible way to give effect to the spiritual re-orientation of which the Western World stood in need, it must be added that this mode also possesses a 'providential' aspect in relation to cyclic evolution, in the sense of being included in the Divine Plan concerning the final development of the present cycle of humanity. From another point of view one may also recognize, in the disproportion between the purely spiritual quality of the Gift of Christ and the heterogenous nature of the environment into which it was received, the mark of an exceptional mode of Divine Mercy, which constantly renews itself for the sake of creatures: in order to 'save' one of the 'sick' parts of humanity, or rather 'a humanity', God consents to be profaned; but on the other hand—and this is a manifestation of His Impersonality which by definition lies beyond the religious point of view—He makes use of this profanation, since 'it must needs be that offences come', in order to bring about the final decadence of the present cycle of humanity, this decadence being necessary for the exhausting of all the possibilities included in this cycle,

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necessary therefore for the equilibrium of the cycle as a whole and the accomplishment of the glorious and universal radiation of God.

The religious point of view is compelled, under penalty of having to admit that the actions of its personal God, the only one it takes into consideration, contradict one another, to define the apparently contradictory acts of the impersonal Divinity—when it cannot deny them purely and simply as it does in the case of the diversity of traditional forms—as ‘mysterious’ and ‘unfathomable’, while naturally attributing these ‘mysteries’ to the Will of the Personal God.

3

The existence of a Christian esotericism, or rather the eminently esoteric character of primitive Christianity, does not only appear from New Testament texts—those in which certain of Christ’s words possess no exoteric meaning—or from the nature of the Christian rites—to speak only of what is more or less accessible ‘from without’ in the Latin Church—but also from the explicit testimony of the older authors. Thus in his work on the Holy Ghost St. Basil speaks of a ‘tacit and mystical tradition maintained down to our own times, and of a secret instruction that our fathers observed without discussion and which we follow by dwelling in the simplicity of their silence. For they understood how necessary was silence in order to maintain the respect and veneration due to our Holy Mysteries. And in fact it was not expedient to make known in writing a doctrine containing things that catechumens are not permitted to contemplate.’ Again, according to St. Denys the Areopagite, ‘Salvation is possible only for deified souls, and deification is nothing else but the union and resemblance we strive to have with God. The things that are bestowed uniformly and all at once, so to speak, on the Blessed Essences dwelling in Heaven, are transmitted to us as it were in fragments and through the multiplicity of the varied symbols of the Divine oracles. For it is on these Divine oracles that our hierarchy is founded. And by these

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words we mean not only what our inspired Masters have left us in the Holy Epistles and in their theological works, but also what they transmitted to their disciples by a kind of spiritual and almost heavenly teaching, initiating them from person to person in a bodily way no doubt, since they spoke, but, I venture to say, in an immaterial way also, since they did not write. But since these truths had to be translated into the usages of the Church, the Apostles expressed them under the veil of symbols and not in their sublime nakedness, for not everyone is holy, and, as the Scriptures say, Knowledge is not for all'.¹

4

We have seen that Christianity is a way of 'Grace' or of 'Love' (the *bhakti-marga* of the Hindus), and this definition calls for some further explanation of a general kind. The most pronounced difference between the New Covenant and the Old is that in the latter the Divine Aspect of Justice predominated, whereas in the former it is on the contrary the Aspect of Mercy which prevails. The way of Mercy is in a certain sense easier than the way of Justice because, while corresponding at the same time to a more profound reality, it also benefits from a special Grace: this is the 'justification by Faith' whose 'yoke is easy and burden light', and which renders the 'yoke of Heaven' of the Mosaic Law unnecessary. Moreover this 'justification by Faith' is analogous—and its whole esoteric significance rests on this—to 'liberation by Knowledge', both being to a greater or less extent independent of the 'Law', that is to say of works.² 'Faith' is in fact nothing else than the '*bhaktic*' mode of Knowledge and of intellectual certainty, which means that Faith is a 'passive' act of the intelligence, its immediate object being not the truth as such, but a symbol of the truth. This symbol will yield up its secrets in proportion to the greatness of the Faith, which in its turn will be determined by an attitude of 'confidence' or of 'emotional certainty', that is to say by an element of *bhakti* or Love. In so far as Faith is a contemplative attitude its subject is the intelligence; it can therefore be said to consti-

¹, ² See notes on pp. 164 and 167.

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tute a virtual Knowledge; but since its mode is passive, it must compensate this passivity by a complementary active attitude, that is to say by a voluntary attitude the substance of which is precisely 'confidence' and 'fervour', by virtue of which the intelligence will receive spiritual certainties. Faith is *a priori* a natural disposition of the soul to admit the 'supernatural'; it is therefore essentially an 'intuition' of the supernatural, brought about by Grace which is 'actualized' by means of the attitude of fervent confidence.* When, through Grace, Faith becomes complete, it will have been dissolved in Love, which is God; that is why, from the religious standpoint, the blessed in Heaven no longer have Faith, since they behold its object, namely God, who is Love or Beatitude. It should be added that from an initiatory point of view, as expressed for example in the teaching of the Hesychast tradition, this vision can and even should be obtained in this life. Another aspect of Faith that may be mentioned here is the connection between Faith and miracles,

* The life of the great *bhakta* Shri Ramakrishna provides a very instructive example of the 'bhaktic' mode of knowledge. The saint wished to understand the identity between gold and clay; but instead of starting out from a metaphysical *datum* which would have enabled him to perceive the vanity of riches, as a *jnānin* would have done, he kept praying to *Kali* to cause him to understand this identity by a revelation: . . . 'every morning, for many long months, I held in my hand a piece of money and a lump of clay and repeated: *gold is clay and clay is gold*. But this thought brought no spiritual work into operation within me; nothing came to prove to me the truth of such a statement. After I know not how many months of meditation, I was sitting one morning at dawn on the bank of the river, imploring our Mother to enlighten me. All of a sudden the whole universe appeared before my eyes clothed in a sparkling mantle of gold. . . . Then the landscape took on a duller glow, the colour of brown clay, even lovelier than the gold. And while this vision engraved itself deeply on my soul, I heard a sound like the trumpeting of more than ten thousand elephants who clamoured in my ear: *Clay and gold are but one thing for you*. My prayers were answered, and I threw far away into the Ganges the piece of gold and the lump of clay.'

In the same connection, we may quote the following reflections of an orthodox theologian: 'A dogma that expresses a revealed truth, which appears to us an unfathomable mystery, must be lived by us by means of a process whereby, instead of assimilating the mystery to our own mode of understanding, we must on the contrary watch for a profound change, an inward transformation of our spirit, so as to make us fit for the mystical experience.' (Vladimir Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Eglise de l'Orient*.)

a connection which explains the great importance of miracles not only in the case of Christ, but in Christianity as such. In Christianity, by contrast with Islam, the miracle plays a central and quasi 'organic' part, and this is not unconnected with the *bhaktic* nature of the Christian way. Miracles would in fact be inexplicable apart from the place that they hold in Faith; possessing no persuasive value in themselves—for otherwise satanic miracles would be a criterion of truth—they nevertheless possess this value to an extreme degree in association with all the other factors that enter into the Christian Revelation. In other words, if the miracles of Christ, the Apostles and the Saints are precious and venerable, this is solely because they are associated with other criteria which *a priori* permit of their being invested with the value of Divine 'signs'. The essential and primordial function of a miracle is either to awaken the grace of Faith—which assumes a natural disposition to admit the supernatural, whether consciously or not, on the part of the person affected by this grace—or to bestow the perfection of a Faith already acquired. To define still more exactly the function of the miracle, not only in Christianity but in all traditional forms—for none of them disregard miraculous facts—it may be said that a miracle, apart from its symbolical character which links it with the object of Faith itself, is calculated to evoke an intuition which becomes an element of certainty in the soul of the believer. Lastly, if miracles can awaken Faith, Faith can in turn bring about miracles, for 'Faith can move mountains'. This reciprocal relationship also shows that these two things are connected cosmologically and that there is nothing arbitrary in this connection; thus, the miracle establishes an immediate contact between the Divine All-Powerfulness and the world, while Faith establishes in its turn an analogous but passive contact between the microcosm and God; ordinary ratiocination, that is to say the discursive operation of the mental faculty, is as far removed from Faith as are natural laws from miracles, while intellectual knowledge will see the miraculous in the natural and vice versa.

As for Charity, which is the most important of the three theo-

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logical virtues, it possesses two aspects, one passive and the other active. Spiritual Love is a passive participation in God who is Infinite Love; but love is on the contrary active in relation to created things, and there is a complementarism in this that is analogous to the complementary passive and active aspects of Faith, the one concerned with Truth, which is God, and the other with our soul, which is creature; and it may be added that in this *bhaktic* perspective, God is always regarded in His Beatific aspect. Now what distinguishes this perspective or method from the purely religious attitude is essentially and before all else, the goal in view, which is not individual but Divine; but it will at once be noticed that the 'technical' analogy between the exoteric and esoteric attitudes in the way of Grace or Love implies that this way cannot insist, as does the way of direct Knowledge (the Hindu *jnāna-marga*) on a clear separation between the two attitudes in question. The way of 'Grace' will therefore distinguish differences of degree rather than differences of nature; from which it results that the exoteric side of Christianity will be a kind of 'lesser esotericism', in a much more immediate sense than for example Jewish exotericism, in relation to which an expression of this kind, while not completely meaningless, is nevertheless far-fetched. Finally, one more observation seems to be called for: questions may well arise as to the nature of the difference, from the standpoint of 'spiritual experience', between the way of direct Knowledge, or let us say the completely intellectual method, and the way of Love in which, as we have seen, Knowledge is infused indirectly into the soul. Now this difference resides only in the respective points of departure of the two ways and not in their actual contact with transcendent Realities; it might be said therefore that the Reality which is *a priori* 'Light' for one and 'Love' for another could be more exactly defined in the first case as 'amorous Light' and in the second as 'luminous Love'; in other words, 'Knowledge' and 'Love' go together in the same way as light and heat, perfect Knowledge being perfect Love, and inversely.

As for the virtue of Hope, all mention of which cannot be

omitted even though it is not as important as the other two theological virtues, it will be sufficient to define it in the following way: in the final analysis Hope is the equilibrium maintained by the individual soul between its knowledge of the absolute and its consciousness of its own relativity. It is for this reason that Hope has been compared with a light in the darkness, that is to say a radiance which, although not the sun's, gives us an inkling of the latter and enables us to bear the blankness of obscurity. Hope is therefore for the individual soul a kind of provisory substitute for the Beatific Vision in which the soul transcends its creature limits.

In conclusion a few words may be said about the secondary mode of Charity, namely, the love of one's neighbour, which, in so far as it is a necessary expression of the Love of God, is an indispensable complement to Faith. These two modes of Charity are affirmed by the Evangelical teaching regarding the Supreme Law, the first mode implying 'consciousness' of the fact that God alone is Beatitude and Reality, and the second 'consciousness' of the fact that the ego is only illusory, the 'me' of others being identified in reality with 'myself';* if I must love my 'neighbour' because he is 'me', this implies that I must love myself, *a priori*, not being other than my 'neighbour'; and if I must love myself, whether in myself or in my 'neighbour', it is because God loves me and I ought to love what He loves; and if He loves me it is because He loves His creation, or in other words, because Existence itself is Love and Love is as it were the perfume of the Creator inherent in every creature. In the same way that the 'Love of God', or the Charity which has as its object the Divine Perfections and not our own well-being, is Knowledge of the one and only Divine Reality in which the apparent reality of the creature is dissolved—a knowledge which implies the identification of the soul with its uncreated

* This realization of the 'non-ego' explains the important part played in Christian spirituality by 'humility'; a similar part is played in Islamic spirituality by 'poverty' (*faqr*) and in Hindu spirituality by 'childlikeness' (*balya*); the symbolism of childhood in the teaching of Christ will be recalled here.

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Essence,* which is yet another aspect of the symbolism of Love—so the 'love of one's neighbour' is basically nothing else than knowledge of the indifferentiation before God of all that is created. Before passing from the 'created' to the 'Creator', or from manifestation to the Principle, it is in fact necessary to have realized the indifferentiation, or let us say the 'nothingness', of all that is manifested. It is towards this that the 'ethic' of Christ is directed, not only by the indistinction that it establishes between the 'me' and the 'not me', but also, in the second place, by its indifference with regard to individual justification and social equilibrium. Christianity is accordingly placed outside the 'actions and reactions' of the human order; by primary definition therefore it is not exoteric. Christian Charity neither has nor can have any interest in 'well-being' for its own sake, because true Christianity, like every orthodox Tradition, considers that the only true happiness human society can enjoy is its spiritual well-being, crowned by the presence of the saint, the goal of every normal civilization; for 'the multitude of the wise is the welfare of the world' (Wisd. of Sol. vi. 24). One of the truths overlooked by moralists is that when a work of charity is accomplished through love of God, or in virtue of the knowledge that 'I' am the 'neighbour' and that the 'neighbour' is 'myself'—a knowledge which implies this love—the work in question has for the 'neighbour' not only the value of an outward benefit, but also that of a benediction. On the other hand, when charity is exercised neither from love of God nor by virtue of the aforesaid knowledge, but solely with a view to human well-being considered as an end in itself, the benediction inherent in true charity does not accompany the apparent well-doing, either for the giver or for the receiver. Some might be tempted to object that Christianity proves itself to be exclusively moral in character by the fact that it puts action, which is a necessary expression of Faith, above knowledge. This 'optical

* 'We are entirely transformed in God'—says Meister Eckhardt—'and changed in Him. Just as, in the sacrament, the bread is changed into the body of Christ, so am I changed in Him, in such wise that He makes me one with His Being and not simply like to it; by the living God, it is true that there is no longer any distinction.'

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illusion' is the cause or pretext for a sentimentalism which affects to despise everything intellectual, as if this were an example of worldly vanity or a kind of impious pride. In reality the New Testament attaches no importance to actions for their own sake, considering them only in function of Faith which is their sufficient reason; while as for Faith, its apparent contempt for speculation is simply due to the fact that, being a direct mode of spirituality, it stands above all ratiocination, though not above intellections. Faith cannot be opposed to Knowledge, being on the contrary, as we have seen, an initiatory or mystical mode of the latter; it merely denies the vicious circle of impotent human thought.* Nor should it be forgotten that the Judæo-Roman world in which Christianity was born was saturated with vain philosophies and other barren speculations, and was dying from a sort of lassitude or disgust. In order to

* Contrary to what occurred in the Greek and Oriental Churches, the intellectuality of the Latin Church became largely identified with the philosophical mode of thought, notwithstanding the formal rejection of philosophy by St. Paul (1 Cor. i. 19; ii. 5-16; iii. 18, 19, 20 and Col. ii. 8). Westerners are moreover compelled to admit this themselves: 'The notion of philosophy came to have a different meaning for the Eastern and Western Churches, in the sense that for the Greeks it comprised quasi organically a large proportion of religious theories *dass der Begriff 'Philosophie' dort ganz wesentlich viel religiöse Weltanschauungskunde umfasste*), while for the Latins it contained, intentionally or involuntarily, the seed which ultimately led to the total separation of religion and rationalist science (*der zur vollkommenen Dualisierung von Religion und Gedankenwissenschaft führen sollte*). Thus the man of the West became the slave of his speculations, whereas the Oriental spirit knew how to preserve its inward liberty and its seemingly backward superiority' (A. M. Ammann S. J., *Die Gottesschau im palamitischen Hesychasmus*). On the other hand, it is strange to note how far certain minds within the Latin Church have gone towards the acceptance not only of philosophical thought as such, but even of specifically modern thought: this attitude has led to a particularly regrettable lack of understanding of certain traditional modes of Christian thought itself, a lack of understanding which reveals itself above all in an inability to conceive of the intrinsic truth of those modes, or let us say in a fixed determination to reduce ideas to the level of historical facts. In the case of those who are foremost in adopting what can only be described as pseudo-intellectual barbarism, anti-Catholic in its origin, their attitude of mind is accompanied by the unshakeable complacency of the 'connoisseur' who arrogates to himself the role of arbiter in every field, and who treats the greatest minds of the past in the spirit of a specialist in mental diseases or a collector of insects.

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cut this 'Gordian Knot' it was essential for the New Revelation to affirm by its form the 'direct', 'formless' and 'non-human' character of true spirituality, or in other words of the 'spirit' which conquers the 'flesh'—the latter denoting everything that is purely of the human order—and this is one of the reasons for the symbolism of 'Love' in the Christian Revelation; and it may be added that the acceptance of philosophical thought, that is to say of 'wisdom according to the flesh', is nothing less than a betrayal of this Love. If some have gone to the point of claiming that the outward work of Charity is more meritorious than the Knowledge of God, and of denying the value of the latter as far as they possibly can, this represents a complete inversion of the primitive meaning of the Christian teaching. The symbol of the higher, by being interpreted literally, becomes a justification of the lower; for love in the proper sense of the term, which by its spontaneous and virtually 'limitless' nature is a marvellous symbol of the direct, non-discursive, infinite and transcendent nature of the Spirit, is a passion, and to interpret this symbol in a narrowly literal sense is to set a passion above intelligence. Even if this passion, for those who make of it their spiritual viaticum, has an object and a goal which do not belong to the terrestrial world, it none the less confirms the limits of the individuality—particularly when it is accompanied by certain negations—whereas it should on the contrary be transmuted into intellectual energy and help to abolish those limits. In reality Christian Charity, far from implying a quite unjustifiable contempt of Knowledge—for such contempt is meaningless except in answer to empty rational speculations—finds in it on the contrary its own basis and sufficient reason; and this Knowledge, whose organ is the 'heart' and not the 'brain', and which is a 'vision' and not a 'reflection', must be conceived, not as the fruit of the feeble human reason, but as the shining forth of a Divine Light 'uncreate and uncreatable'.

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(1) [See p. 156]. We may also quote a contemporary Catholic author, Paul Vulliaud: 'We have put forward the view that the process of dogmatic enunciation during the first centuries was one of successive initiation, or in a word that there existed an exotericism and an esotericism in the Christian religion. Historians may not like it, but one finds incontestable traces of the *lex arcani* at the origin of our religion. . . . In order to grasp quite clearly the doctrinal teaching of the Christian Revelation it is necessary to admit, as we have already insisted, the twofold nature of the gospel preaching. The rule enjoining that the dogmas should only be revealed to Initiates continued in operation long enough to enable even the blindest and most refractory observers to detect undeniable traces of it. Sozoma, a historian, wrote concerning the Council of Nicaea that he wished to record it in detail, primarily 'in order to leave for posterity a public monument of truth'. He was advised to remain silent concerning 'that which must not be known except by priests and the faithful'. The 'law of the secret' was in consequence perpetuated, in certain places, even after the universal conciliar divulgation of the Dogma. . . . Saint Basil, in his work *On the true and pious faith*, relates how he avoided making use of terms, such as Trinity and consubstantiality, which, as he said, do not occur in the Scriptures, although the things which they denote are to be found there. . . . Tertullian says, opposing Praxeas, that one should not speak in so many words of the Divinity of Jesus Christ and that one should call the Father *God* and the Son *Lord*. . . . Do not such locutions, practised habitually, seem like the signs of a convention, since this reticence of language is found in all the authors of the first centuries and is of canonical application? The primitive discipline of Christianity included an examination at which the *competent* (those who asked for baptism) were admitted to election. This examination was called the scrutiny. The Sign of the Cross was made on the ears of the catechumen with the word *Ephpheta*, for which reason this ceremony came to be called 'the scrutiny of the opening of the ears'. The ears were opened to the *reception* (cabālāh) or *tradition* of the Divine truths. . . . The synoptico-johannine problem . . . cannot be resolved except by recalling the existence of a twofold teaching, exoteric and achromatic, historical and theologico-mystical. . . . There is a parabolic theology. It formed part of that inheritance which Theodoret calls, in the preface to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, the 'paternal inheritance', which signifies the transmission of the sense applicable to the interpretation of the Scriptures. . . . The Dogma, in its divine part, constituted the

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revelation reserved to the Initiates, under the 'Discipline of the Secret'. Tenzelius claimed to have traced back the origin of this 'law of the secret' to the end of the second century. . . . Emmanuel Schelstrate, librarian of the Vatican, observed it with good reason in apostolic times. In reality, the esoteric manner of transmitting divine truths and interpreting texts existed among both Jews and Gentiles, as it later existed among Christians . . . if one obstinately refuses to study the initiatory processes of Revelation, one will never arrive at an intelligent subjective assimilation of the Dogma. The ancient Liturgies are not sufficiently put to use, and in the same way Hebrew scholarship is absolutely neglected. . . . The Apostles and the Fathers have preserved in secret and silence the 'Majesty of the Mysteries', St. Denys the Areopagite has of set purpose cultivated the use of obscure words; as Christ assumed the title 'Son of Man', so he calls baptism: Initiation to Theogenesis. . . . The discipline of the secret was fully justified. Neither the Prophets nor Christ Himself revealed the divine secrets with such clearness as to make them comprehensible to all (Paul Vulliaud, *Études d'Esotérisme Catholique*).

Lastly we should like to quote, for the sake of documentation and despite the length of the text, an author of the early nineteenth century: 'In the beginning Christianity was an initiation comparable to those of the pagans. When speaking of this religion Clement of Alexandria exclaims: 'Oh truly sacred mysteries! Oh pure light! Amid the gleam of torches falls the veil which covers God and Heaven. I become holy from the moment I am *initiated*. It is the Lord Himself who is the hierophant; He sets His *seal* upon the adept whom he enlightens; and to reward his faith he commends him eternally to His Father. Those are the orgies of my mysteries. *Come and seek admission to them.*' These words might be taken in a merely metaphorical sense; but the facts prove that they must be interpreted literally. The Gospels are full of calculated reticences and of allusions to Christian initiation. Thus one may read: 'he who hath ears, let him hear'. Jesus, when addressing the multitude, always made use of parables. 'Seek', he said, 'and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' The meetings were in secret and people were only admitted under stated conditions. Complete understanding of the doctrine was only achieved after passing through three grades of instruction. The Initiates were consequently divided into three classes. The first class comprised the *hearers*, the second the *catechumens* or the *competent*, and the third the faithful! The hearers were novices, who were prepared, by means of certain practices and instructions, for the communication of the dogmas of Christianity. A portion of these dogmas was disclosed to the catechumens who, after the prescribed

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purifications, received baptism or *Initiation to Theogenesis* (divine generation), as St. Denys calls it in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*; from that time onward they became *servants of the faith* and had free access to the churches. In the mysteries there was nothing secret or hidden from the faithful; all was accomplished in their presence; they could see all and hear all; they had the right to be present during the whole liturgy; it was enjoined upon them that they should watch attentively lest any profane person or initiate of inferior rank should slip in among them; and the *sign of the cross* served them as a sign of recognition. The mysteries were divided into two parts. The first was called the *Mass of the Catechumens*, because members of that class were allowed to attend it; it included all that is said from the beginning of the Divine Office up to the recitation of the creed. The second part was called the *Mass of the Faithful*. It included the preparation of the *sacrifice*, the sacrifice itself, and the giving of thanks which follows. When this Mass was about to begin a deacon cried in a loud voice: *Sancta sanctis; foris canes*; 'The holy things are for the holy; let the dogs go out!' Thereupon they expelled the catechumens and the penitents, the latter being members of the faithful who, having some serious fault on their conscience, had been subjected to the penances prescribed by the Church, and thus were unable to be present at the celebration of the *awful mysteries*, as St. John Chrysostom calls them. The faithful, once alone, recited the symbol of the faith, in order to ensure that all present had received initiation and so that one might safely hold converse before them *openly and without enigmas* concerning the great mysteries of the religion and especially of the Eucharist. The doctrine and the celebration of this sacrament was guarded as an inviolable secret; and if the doctors referred to it in their sermons or books, they did so only with great reserve, by indirect allusion and enigmatically. When Diocletian ordered the Christians to deliver their sacred books to the magistrates, those among them who obeyed this edict of the Emperor from fear of death were driven out of the community of the faithful and were looked upon as traitors and apostates. St. Augustine gives us some idea of the grief of the Church at seeing the sacred Scriptures handed over to unbelievers. In the eyes of the Church it was regarded as a terrible profanation when a man who had not been initiated entered the temple and witnessed the holy mysteries. St. John Chrysostom mentions a case of this kind to Pope Innocent I. Some barbarian soldiers had entered the Church of Constantinople on Easter Eve. 'The female catechumens, who had just undressed in order to be baptised, were compelled by fear to flee in a state of nakedness; the barbarians did not allow them time to cover themselves. The bar-

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barians then entered the places where the sacred things are kept and venerated, and some of them, *who had not yet been initiated into our mysteries*, saw all the most sacred things that were there.' In the seventh century, the constant increase in the number of the faithful led to the institution by the Church of the minor orders, among which were numbered the *porters*, who succeeded the deacons and subdeacons in the duty of guarding the doors of the churches. About the year 700, everyone was admitted to the spectacle of the liturgy; and of all the mystery which in early times surrounded the sacred ceremonial, there remained only the custom of reciting secretly the Canon of the Mass. Nevertheless even to-day, in the Greek rite, the officiating priest celebrates the Divine Office behind a curtain, which is drawn back only at the moment of the Elevation; but at this moment those assisting should be prostrated or inclined in such a manner that they cannot see the holy sacrament.' (F. T. B. Clavel, *Histoire pittoresque de la Franc-Maçonnerie et des Sociétés secrètes anciennes et modernes*).

(2) [See p. 156.] A distinction analogous to the one that sets in opposition 'Faith' and the 'Law' is to be found within the initiatory realm itself; to 'Faith' correspond here the various spiritual movements founded upon the invocation of a Divine Name (the Hindu *japa*, the Buddhist *buddhānsmṛiti*, *nien-fo* or *nembutsu*, and the Moslem *dhikr*); a particularly characteristic example is provided by Shri Chaitanya, who threw away all his books in order to devote himself exclusively to the '*bhakti*' invocation of Krishna, an attitude comparable to that of the Christians who rejected the 'Law' and 'works' in the name of 'Faith' and 'Love'. Similarly, to cite yet another example, the Japanese Buddhist schools called *Jōdo* and *Jōdo-Shinshu*, whose doctrine, founded on the *sūtras* of *Amithaba*, is analogous to certain doctrines of Chinese Buddhism and proceeds, like them, from the 'original vow of *Amida*', reject the meditations and austerities of the other Buddhist schools in order to devote themselves exclusively to the invocation of the sacred Name of *Amida*: here ascetic effort is replaced by simple confidence in the Grace of the *Buddha-Amida*, a Grace which he bestows out of his Compassion on those who invoke Him, independently of any 'merit' on their part. 'The invocation of the holy Name must be accompanied by an absolute sincerity of heart and the most complete faith in the goodness of *Amida*, whose wish it is that all creatures should be saved. In place of virtues, in place of knowledge, *Amida*, taking pity on the men of the "Latter Days", has allowed that there be substituted faith in the redemptive value of His Grace, in order that they may be delivered from the sufferings of the world. We are

all equal by the effect of our common faith and of our confidence in the Grace of *Amida-Buddha*.' 'Every creature, however great a sinner it may be, is certain of being saved and enfolded in the light of *Amida* and of obtaining a place in the eternal and imperishable Land of Happiness, if only it believes in the Name of *Amida-Buddha* and, abandoning the present and future cares of the world, takes refuge in the liberating Hands so mercifully stretched out towards all creatures, reciting His Name with an entire sincerity of heart.' 'We know the Name of *Amida* through the preaching of *Sākya-Munī*, and we know that included in this Name is the power of *Amida*'s wish to save all creatures. To hear this Name is to hear the voice of Salvation saying: Have confidence in Me and I shall surely save you, words which *Amida* addresses to us directly. This meaning is contained in the Name *Amida*. Whereas all our other actions are more or less stained with impurity, the repetition of the *Namu-Amida-Bu* is an act devoid of all impurity, for it is not we who recite it but *Amida* Himself who, giving us His own Name, makes us repeat It.' 'When once belief in our salvation by *Amida* has been awakened and strengthened, our destiny is fixed: we shall be reborn in the Pure Land and shall become Buddhas. Then, it is said, we shall be entirely enfolded in the Light of *Amida* and living under His loving direction, our life will be filled with joy unspeakable, gift of the *Buddha*.' (From *Les Sectes Bouddhiques Japonaises* by E. Steinilber-Oberlin and Kuni Matsuo). 'The original vow of *Amida* is to receive in his Land of Felicity whoever shall pronounce His Name with absolute confidence: happy then are those who pronounce His Name! A man may possess faith, but if he does not pronounce the Name his faith will be of no use to him. Another may pronounce the Name while thinking of that alone, but if his faith is not sufficiently deep, his re-birth will not take place. But he who believes firmly in re-birth as the goal of *nembutsu* (invocation) and who pronounces the Name, the same will without any doubt be reborn in the Land of Reward.' (From *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, Vol. III, by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki). It will not have been difficult to recognise the analogies to which we desired to draw attention: *Amida* is none other than the divine Word. *Amida-Buddha* can therefore be translated, in Christian terms, as 'God the Son, the Christ', the Name 'Christ Jesus' being equivalent to the Name *Buddha Sākya-Munī*; the redemptive Name *Amida* corresponds exactly to the Eucharist and the invocation of that Name to Communion; lastly, the distinction between *jiriki* (individual power, that is to say effort with a view to merit) and *tariki* ('power of the other', that is to say Grace apart from merit)—the latter being the way of *Jōdo-Shinshu*—is analogous to the Pauline distinction between the 'Law' and 'Faith'. It may be

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added that if modern Christianity is suffering in some measure from a decline of the intellectual element, this is precisely because its original spirituality was of a 'bhaktic' nature, and an exteriorization of *bhakti* leads inevitably to a decline of intellectuality in favour of sentimentality.

Chapter IX

OF THE CHRIST-GIVEN
INITIATION

HAVING dealt with all the foregoing questions of principle, we must now consider the question of Christian initiation as it existed until modern times, and as it still perhaps exists to-day among certain monks of Hesychast lineage on Mount Athos or among other spiritual descendants of the same family. In fact it is the Hesychast Tradition, from the Desert Fathers to the 'Russian Pilgrim',* which undoubtedly represents in its most unaltered form the inheritance of primitive Christian spirituality, that which properly can be called 'Christ-given'. Before going further, however, a few words must be said on the subject of the esotericism of Western Christianity, which raises in particular the question both of the Templars and the craft initiations. If Christian esotericism derives essentially from the person of Christ, it may be asked how it came about that the Templars, Masonry and the Guilds each represented in turn something that from the beginning, and independently of any outside contribution, was implicit in Christianity itself as such? So far as the Order of the Temple is concerned, despite its warlike character and certain Islamic and Druidic influences, it derives from Christian spirituality by much the same right as the monastic orders. As for those forms of Western esotericism not specifically Christian, namely Mason-

* *The Way of a Pilgrim*, translated by R. M. French. This book has been mentioned not only on account of its documentary value in relation to Hesychasm in general, but because it describes a way which represents in our own times, or nearly so, a sort of final flowering of Hesychast spirituality.

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ry and the Guilds, which, however, only became distinct at a fairly late stage in their existence, they are pre-Christian, perhaps Phœnician, in origin, unless their origin is identified with that of sedentarism and architecture themselves, as certain Masonic legends seem to imply; they do not, therefore, trace their descent from Christ. These craft initiations were nevertheless integrated into Christian civilization, but since their origin—like that of Hermetism—goes back much further than that of Christianity, it would be more appropriate to apply to them a term such as 'Christianized esotericism', unless this name be kept as strictly it should be, for certain Druidic elements, recognizable in the legends of the Round Table, which were not merely integrated in the Christian form in an outward manner, but really absorbed by it—an absorption, which moreover, took place through the tradition of the Templars.

As for the monastic orders their presence can only be explained by the existence, in the Western as well as the Eastern Church, of an initiatory tradition going back—as St. Benedict and the Hesychasts alike testify—to the Desert Fathers and so to the Apostles and to Christ. The fact that the cenobitism of the Latin Church can be traced back to the same origins as that of the Greek Church—the latter, however, consisting of a single community and not different orders—clearly proves that the first is initiatory in essence like the second; moreover the hermetical life is considered by both to mark the summit of spiritual perfection—St. Benedict said so expressly in his Rule—and it may therefore be concluded that the disappearance of the hermits marks the decline of the Christ-given initiation. Monastic life, far from constituting a self-sufficient way, is described in the Rule of St. Benedict as a 'commencement of religious life', while for 'him who hasten his steps towards the perfection of monastic life, there are the teachings of the Holy Fathers, the carrying out of which leads man to the supreme end of religion';* now these teachings contain in a doctrinal

* We would like to quote the remainder of this passage, which is taken from the last chapter of the book entitled 'That the practice of justice is not wholly contained in this rule': 'What page is there of the Old or New Testa-

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form the very essence of Hesychasm. Unfortunately, in the orders of the Western Church, with which we are more particularly concerned here, this initiatory character hardly seems to have maintained itself beyond the Renaissance, that period of impassioned individualism and spiritual collapse, and this fact in certain respects explains the coming into being of the modern world; mysticism alone, in the theological sense of the term, seems to have outlived this collapse.

To understand the mystic mode of spirituality properly, it is necessary in the first place to have regard to the *bhaktic* nature of Christianity, which readily lends itself to a confusion between the two great traditional 'dimensions', the outward and the inward. The reason for this lies in the *bhaktic* method itself, which is founded on individual attitudes, namely 'faith' and 'love'. It may be said that mysticism is derived—though this must not be understood solely in an historical sense—from the 'methodical', quasi 'material' or 'feminine' part of the *bhaktic* way, as a consequence of the loss of its superior complement, the intellectual, 'essential' or 'masculine' part; and this happened the more easily owing to the fact that the transmission of the properly initiatory teaching, as far as its higher elements were concerned, was oral, as St. Denys the Areopagite attests when he speaks of 'what they (our inspired Masters) transmitted to their disciples by a sort of spiritual and almost celestial teaching, initiating them from spirit to spirit in a way that was doubtless corporeal, since they used the spoken word, but I dare to say

ment, what Divinely authorized word therein, that is not a sure rule for the conduct of man? Again, what book of the holy Catholic Fathers does not resolutely teach us the right road to attain our Creator? Furthermore, what are the Discourses of the Fathers, their Institutions and their lives (those of the Desert Fathers), and what is the rule of our Father St. Basil, if not a pattern for monks who live and obey as they ought, and the authentic charters of the virtues? For us who are lax, who lead blameful lives and are full of negligence, herein is indeed cause to blush with confusion. Whoever then thou mayest be who pressest forward toward the heavenly homeland, accomplish first, with the help of Christ, this poor outline of a rule that we have traced; then at last, with the protection of God, wilt thou reach those sublimer heights of doctrine and virtue the memory of which we have just evoked.'

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immaterial also, since they did not put it down in writing'. Mysticism may therefore be defined as follows: it is the purely religious application—one therefore limited to the individuality as regards both end and means—of the *bhaktic* way, of which it consequently comes to represent a sort of 'residue'. It is obvious that only the loss of the genuinely intellectual and esoteric Grace can explain the confusions and contradictions which are encountered in the visions and 'revelations' of the mystics, including those who have been declared Saints because of their heroic virtues;* nothing similar is in fact encountered in the spiritual experiences of initiates, and inability to recognize the falsity of an inspiration would be incompatible with spiritual perfection in the esoteric and Oriental sense, whereas, so far as mystics are concerned, this inability is not even an obstacle to canonization. In addition to this absence of true intellectuality, it is necessary to remark once again upon the individualism of the mystic way, and these two causes, which are moreover bound up together, explain the preponderant part played in this path by 'ordeals'—in the ordinary sense of the word—and the resulting cult of suffering.† If the mystic way is grievous by

* 'Errors . . . have sometimes gone so far that it has been impossible to know what value to attribute to some of the revelations made to Saints. Father Lancicius, quoted by Benedict XIV (*De Canon*, I. iii. c. LIII. No. 17) says: "I could name several ecstatic women whom the Holy See has included in the number of the Saints; I have read the revelations which they believed they had received during ecstasy or thereafter. They are strewn with hallucinations and it is for this reason that their publication has been prohibited"' (Father Aug. Poulain: *Des Grâces d'Oraison, Traité de Théologie Mystique*).

† It might be thought that the cult of suffering is not peculiar to mysticism, but to Christianity as such, since it may be referred to the sufferings of Christ and the martyrs and to the dolours of the Virgin. That is certainly true, but these sacred sorrows are clearly also capable of a symbolism and an application that is inward, speculative and spiritual, as is proved by the perspective of the Greek Church. Let us consider the following significant feature, namely *the almost complete silence in the homilies of the Byzantine spiritual masters on the subject of the historical Jesus, and the allegorical interpretation which in the Alexandrian tradition is given to all Christ's words . . .* For the Greeks, the Passion itself is never that of the Man Jesus. . . . It is associated with the hypostasis of the Son wherein, by the *privilegium unitatis*, divinity and humanity are to be found in their entirety. . . . One glance at the respective iconographies is enough to convince us of the essential difference between East and West. In the

definition, it is because of the 'disproportion' or 'contradiction' which its individualism involves. In other words, this way suffers from an inward paradox in that it aspires to God on the plane of individual limitations. The mystic appears to be ignorant of the fact that imperfection comes from the individuality as such and not from an 'accidental' quality of the individuality; hence the tendency of many if not the majority of mystics to devote themselves to the sorrowful consideration of their human imperfection, rather than to the calming and liberating contemplation of Divine Perfection. Furthermore the 'ordeals' inseparable from the mystic way are largely due to a cosmic 'reaction' against what amounts to the wholesale repudiation, on the part of the mystic, of things created, an 'individualist' negation which is based on a failure to recognize the divine quality inherent in Creation. This lack of understanding goes hand in hand with the ignoring of the Intellect, which is uncreated, 'paracletic' and 'redemptive', and this second negation is the cause of the 'temptations against faith' which mystics have sometimes had to suffer to an extent that can hardly be imagined by an ordinary human being. What has just been said will also make it clear that 'heroic virtues' are relatively unimportant as

Middle Ages, and even earlier, we find in the foreground an increasingly pathetic representation of the *human* sufferings of Christ; flagellation, the Way of the Cross, instruments of the Passion, the agony on Calvary, not to mention innumerable scenes of martyrdom. . . . Among the Greeks, *for whom religious art is the object of a cult, or rather of veneration (proskinesis)*, a conscious idealization and a detachment from terrestrial realities makes its appearance; here sorrow is always transfigured. . . . Orthodox holiness has never known and could not have known the delight and frenzies of the Cross, nor felt, imprinted on its flesh, the stigmata of the blessed wounds. Neither has it heard the call of the Sacred Heart which seems to it to destroy the organic unity of the Saviour, for which its doctors have struggled so hard. Howbeit according to the firm belief of this Church, its Saints have also enjoyed, during their lifetimes, the most precious physical gifts of grace: levitation, luminosity and other precursory signs of the 'spiritual flesh' solemnly announced by the Apostle. . . . Innumerable are the Oriental hagiographies dealing with these beings without desires or needs, as though they were disembodied, or with their supernatural power, as when they tamed the wild beasts of the desert by their seraphic gentleness or control even the forces of nature (Mme Lot-Borodine: *La doctrine de la déification dans l'Église grecque*, in the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*).

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a criterion of spirituality, inasmuch as they are conditioned in many cases by a lack of intellectuality. The fear of damnation, for instance, can stimulate a man to apparently superhuman efforts, though it none the less implies, for a wide variety of reasons, a lack of intellectual understanding. The mystic ignores and must ignore the fact that the dangers arising from human nature can be compensated and neutralized by the Intellect, which by definition contemplates the Divine Nature; disregarding intellectuality and its compensatory virtue, the mystic is quite naturally led to overestimate the importance of moral effort, and to see in the intelligence—which he readily confuses with mere reason—either an element of lesser importance or else something ‘Luciferian’ or ‘immoral’, whence the assimilation of intelligence to pride. This false assimilation, which takes place the more readily in that intellectual contemplation, being a truly ‘deifying’ act, is capable of rendering unnecessary many efforts and ‘ordeals’, is not unrelated to the ‘sin against the Holy Ghost, and consequently to the painful obscurities that the mystic has to endure. It is this ignorance of the compensatory or ‘redemptive’ quality of pure intelligence that in many cases conditions the ‘heroic virtues’. Although we are very far from denying the potential value of such virtues, it nevertheless remains true that their value is not absolute, as is proved for example by the fact that the Apostles did not fast. Nevertheless mysticism does contain an element which by reason of its compensatory quality corresponds to intellectuality, and this is the mystic’s confident self-abandonment to the Mercy of God; it is by this attitude that mysticism rejoins the method of *bhaktic* spirituality.*

From what we have said regarding the genesis of mysticism, it will be understood that the latter is a human possibility which, as such, must be capable of manifesting itself everywhere under certain conditions; this final reservation is, how-

* The ‘little way’ of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus was in a certain sense more ‘intellectual’ and less ‘tormented’ than the way of the saintly Curé d’Ars, who came near to fearing damnation, and it was owing to this attitude of confidence that the Saint was able to make the profound observation: ‘I am too little to be damned, little children are not damned.’

ever, of great importance, since the conditions necessary for the growth of mysticism have become general only in the Christian world, where mysticism has consequently become the normal mode of spirituality; it is nevertheless true that those same conditions may also occur under exceptional circumstances in other civilizations. Thus it normally happens that those elements which in the West would be attracted by mysticism are in other civilizations 'absorbed' in varying degrees by initiatory organizations of a *bhaktic* nature; but in our times there is always the possibility of such organizations having reached such a state of decadence that their teaching is no longer distinguishable from exotericism, and it may then happen that certain individuals, although 'esotericists' in principle, become 'mystics' in point of fact, at least as regards their attitude. In no case, however, do these possible exceptions justify the attribution of a mystical character, in the religious sense of the term, to any initiatory organization, nor do they make it permissible to speak generally of an Oriental mysticism or of one belonging to Antiquity.

2

Let us now return to the most direct and untouched branch of Christian initiation, namely Hesychasm. The esoteric nature of Hesychasm is affirmed by numerous criteria, the first of these, which is of a doctrinal order, being the apophatic and antinomian conception of the Divinity. According to the great Gregory Palamas, whose doctrine is of fundamental importance for Orthodox theology and represents a strictly traditional synthesis of the teachings of Fathers such as Saint Denys the Areopagite and St. Gregory of Nyssa, or rather of all the Greek Fathers right back to the Apostles*—and we may observe here

* St. Gregory Palamas refers also, and for preference, to the authority of St. Athanasius of Alexandria, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. John Damascenus, St. Macarius of Egypt, St. Diadochus and St. John Climacus. We have cited these names in order to underline the fact that Hesychasm, which

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that the term 'theology' does not in this case imply the limitations imposed upon it by the Scholastic 'logic'—according to St. Gregory Palamas, the definition 'Being' cannot by any means be applied to the Divinity. The attributes of Being are not therefore appropriate to God, 'who is beyond every name that can be named* and everything that can be thought'. God is therefore essentially 'Non-Being'—in the 'positive' sense in which Taoism understands this term—in His 'Quiddity' or 'Aseity' (*ὑπαρξίς*); consequently, although He comprises Being (*υὐσία*) He is infinitely beyond it. The Trinity, according to this doctrine, is not coincidental with the Divine 'Quiddity' (which is the Supreme Divine Reality denoted in Sanskrit by the term *Advaita*, 'Non-duality', and in Arabic by the term *Ahadiyah*, 'Unity'), for the latter is beyond every determination or affirmation of whatever kind. What is named 'God' cannot be this 'Quiddity' in Itself; it is only the conceivable Divine 'Energy' that is denoted by this name. This distinction between the Divine 'Quiddity' and 'Energies' which, though also Divine and uncreated,† are not identifiable with the Divinity 'in Itself' (*κχθ' ἐαυτόν*), is yet another fundamental criterion of the esoteric nature of the Palamite doctrine, the principal aspects of which are, as we have already pointed out, its apophatic and antinomian character. We have seen that apophatism takes us

is too often looked upon as a philosophico-mystical 'curiosity' of purely historical interest, has its roots in Christianity as such, and that it is not merely a rather special development of Christian spirituality, but its purest and deepest expression.

* One may recall here the famous sentence from the *Tao Te King*: 'The name that can be named is not the Real Name.'

† One of the innumerable Divine 'Energies' is the Divine and Uncreated Light: 'God is called Light', says St. Gregory Palamas, 'not with reference to his 'Aseity', but with reference to his 'Energy'. According to St. Macarius of Egypt, 'the crowns and diadems which Christians receive are uncreated' (*Sixth Homily*); and according to St. John Damascenus, 'The Light of the transfiguration is uncreated' (*Homily on the Lord's transfiguration*). Deifying Grace is a mode of this Light, which has many modalities and degrees; this Grace is therefore an illumination by the 'Unmanifest', made possible by the shedding—whether temporary or permanent—of the 'veils' of manifestation which shroud the 'heart'.

beyond the limits of ontology; as for antinomianism, which is inseparable from it and the full significance of which will be apparent in the light of what has been said in the first chapter of this book, it results in the last analysis from the knowledge that the Divine Reality is not subject to the laws of ordinary logic, so that when human thought sets out to translate certain aspects of this Reality, it is obliged to clothe itself in apparently contradictory expressions.

The initiatory character of the Hesychast tradition—and it is to this tradition that Orthodox theology owes its great depth—appears no less clearly in the elements of the method of spiritual realization. This method has been handed down, through the Desert Fathers, in a direct line of descent from primitive Christianity—which does not of course imply that all its later formulations and adaptations are to be found as such from the very outset, but simply that all the forms of Hesychasm are derived with strict traditional fidelity from something that existed in Christianity at the beginning—and it possesses characteristics which clearly distinguish it from the methods of ordinary religious piety, linking it to the methods used in *Yoga* and Sufism and all other analogous ways. The Hesychast method has not in fact a specifically ‘moral’, ‘social’ or ‘psychological’ character, being on the contrary purely contemplative—‘egotistical’ and ‘unproductive’ some would doubtless call it, unaware that the greatest benefit for a human society (to speak only of extrinsic values which alone interest shallow minds) is the presence of the spiritual man and the blessing that he diffuses.

However, let us examine in more detail the characteristics of the Hesychast way. Its starting point is the analogy between the human microcosm and the Divine Metacosm, and all its spiritual realization may be said to be based on this analogy. Knowledge of God is not to be attained by means of thought, which would indeed be impossible, but through the perfection of the analogy already referred to, which alone enables the limitations of the created nature to be finally transcended; hence the extreme importance attaching to the virtues, the deepest significance of which lies in the fact that they retrace in

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the microcosm 'Divine Attitudes', and therefore universal or macrocosmic Laws. It is also very important, from an esoteric standpoint, to observe the part played by the body in the Hesychast way. Hesychasm refuses to see in the latter the principle of evil and the source of all sin*—which would be a blasphemy against the Creator and a dualist error akin to Manicheism—but on the contrary recognizes in the human body, of which the perfect prototypes are the bodies of Adam and Eve, and the sublime manifestations the bodies of Christ and the Virgin, a work of God in which He is reflected, and therefore a 'tabernacle of the Holy Spirit' and a 'House of God'—and here it is well to remember that the 'Word was made flesh', and not just 'soul'.† On the other hand, for Hesychasm, the absence of passions does not imply their annihilation purely and simply, but their transmutation into spiritual energy. It will be observed that this conception, which finds its equivalent in Tantrism—to mention a particularly characteristic example in this respect—clearly goes beyond the limits of mere morality and social opportunism. The body, according to the Hesychasts, can participate here and now in the blessed life of the spirit; the 'sanctified body' can 'savour the Divine'; but in order to attain this sanctification the spirit must be constantly maintained within the limits of the body, in conformity with this statement of St. John Climacus: 'A Hesychast is one who strives to grasp the incorporeal in the corporeal.'¹ Inversely, the wandering of the spirit 'outside the body' is considered as the source of all spiritual aberration; as for the maintaining of the spirit within the body, it requires, contrary to an opinion that is widely held among adherents of the moral point of view, more considerable effort than is demanded by any other activity, greater, for example, than the effort needed for the attainment

¹ See note on p. 189.

* This accords with the Islamic doctrine according to which the principal obstacle to the perfecting of man is not the body but 'the soul inciting to evil' (*en-nefs el-'ammarah*).

† We have explained the reasons for this in the chapter on forms in art; what we there said regarding the analogically inverse situation of sensible forms in relation to intellections, applies equally to our body, which is the 'extreme' reflection of the Intellect.

of any one of the virtues, and the reason for this is that perfect and permanent 'concentration' implies synthetically all possible virtues.*

The organ of the spirit, or the principal centre of spiritual life, is the heart; here again the Hesychast doctrine is in perfect accord with the teaching of every other initiatory tradition. But what is more important from the standpoint of spiritual realization is the teaching of Hesychasm on the means of perfecting the natural participation of the human microcosm in the Divine Metacosm, that is to say the transmutation of this participation into supernatural participation and finally into union and identity: this means consists of the 'inward prayer' or 'prayer of Jesus'. This 'prayer'—which in principle is reserved for an *élite*, thus proving its extra-religious character—surpasses all the virtues in excellence,† for it is a Divine act in us and for that reason the best of all possible acts. It is only by means of this 'prayer' that the creature can be really united with his Creator; the goal of this 'prayer' is consequently the 'supreme' spiritual state, in which man becomes detached from everything pertaining to the creature and, being directly united with the Divinity, is illuminated by the Divine Light. This supreme state is the 'Holy Silence' (*ἡσυχία*), symbolized by the black colour

* We may quote here the reply given by the Prophet Mohammed when he was asked whether the Holy War was not as precious as the invocation of *Allāh*: 'No, not even if you fight on until your sword is shattered.' According to another *hadīth*, the Prophet said on returning from a battle: We have returned from the lesser Holy War (*El-Jihād el-asghar*) to the greater Holy War' (*El Jihād el-akbar*).

† Attention must be called to the extreme importance which Moslem esotericism attaches to the practice of the virtues, which are enumerated at length, with detailed commentaries, in many Sufic treatises. Each virtue is equivalent to the removal of a 'veil' (*hijāb*) which prevents the ray of Grace from reaching the soul; in other terms, every virtue is an eye which sees *Allāh*. It can therefore be said—bearing in mind that the most important thing is the permanent concentration of our whole being on the Supreme Reality—that virtues such as 'abstinence' (*zuhd*), 'confidence' (*tawakkul*), 'patience' (*subr*), 'sadness' (*huzn*), 'fear' (*khauf*), 'hope' (*rajā*), 'gratitude' (*shukr*), 'sincerity' (*sidq*) and 'contentment' (*ridhā*) are so many modes of concentration, secondary and indirect in themselves, but in a greater or less measure indispensable having regard to the constitution of the human soul.

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given to certain Virgins.* The 'prayer of Jesus', like every other initiatory rite, but unlike religious rites the finality of which does not transcend the individual, is strictly methodical; that is to say it is subject to technical ordinances, the purpose of which will inevitably escape the profane mind,† such as, for example, control of breathing (*ἀναπνοή*)‡ in order to facilitate the 'maintenance of the spirit within man and its union with the heart'.

To those who consider 'spiritual prayer' as a simple and even superfluous practice—another example of the 'moralist' prejudice—the Palamite doctrine replies that this prayer represents on the contrary the 'straitest' way possible, but that in return it leads to the highest pinnacle of perfection, on condition—and this is essential and reduces to nothing the shallow suspicions of 'moralists'—that the activity of prayer be in agreement with all the remainder of the being's activities! In other words, the virtues—or conformity to the Divine Law—constitute the *conditio sine qua non* without which the 'spiritual prayer' would be ineffective; we are therefore a long way from the naïve illusion of those who imagine that it is possible to attain the Infinite by means of merely mechanical practices, without any other undertaking or obligation. 'Virtue'—so the Palamite teaching maintains—'disposes us for union with God but Grace

* This 'silence' is the exact equivalent of the Hindu and Buddhist *nirvāna* and the Sufic *fanā* (both terms signifying 'extinction'); the 'poverty' (*faqr*) in which 'union' (*tawhīd*) is achieved refers to the same symbolism. Regarding this real union—or this re-integration of the finite in the Infinite—we may also mention the title of a book by St. Gregory Palamas: 'Witnesses of the Saints, showing that those who participate in Divine Grace become, conformably with Grace itself, without origin and infinite.' It would be impossible to express the 'Supreme Identity' more succinctly than this. We may also recall in this connection the following adage of Moslem esotericism: 'The Sufi is not created'.

† Hence the facile irony of those 'antichrists' who hasten to play the part, defined in the Gospels, of 'swine' and 'dogs'.

‡ St. John Climacus, speaking of the 'prayer of Jesus', says that 'it should be as one with thy breathing, and thou shalt know the fruit of silence and of solitude'. 'Blessed is he', says St. Hesychius, 'whose thought is merged in the invocation of the Name of Jesus and who utters it continually in his heart, in the same way that the air is linked to our bodies or the flame to a candle.'

We may recall here the importance which is attached to the control of respiration (*prāṇāyāma*) in *hatha-yoga* and other Oriental methods.

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accomplishes this inexpressible union'. If the virtues are able in this way to play the part of modes of knowledge, it is because they retrace by analogy 'Divine Attitudes'; there is in fact no virtue which does not derive from a Divine Prototype, and therein lies their deepest meaning: 'to be' is 'to know'.

Lastly we must emphasize the fundamental and truly universal significance of the invocation of the Divine Name. This Name, in the Christian form—as in the Buddhist form and in certain initiatory branches of the Hindu tradition—is a name of the manifested Word,* in this case the Name of 'Jesus', which, like every revealed Divine Name when ritually pronounced, is mysteriously identified with the Divinity. It is in the Divine Name that there takes place the mysterious meeting of the created and the Uncreate, the contingent and the Absolute, the finite and the Infinite. The Divine Name is thus a manifestation of the Supreme Principle, or to speak still more plainly, it is the Supreme Principle manifesting Itself; it is not therefore in the first place a manifestation, but the Principle itself.† 'The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come'—says the prophet Joel—'but whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered,'‡ and we may also recall the beginning of the first Epistle to the Corinthians addressed 'to all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord', and the injunction contained in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians to 'unceasing prayer', on which St. John Damascenus comments as follows: 'We must learn to invoke God's Name more often than we breathe, at all times and everywhere and during all our labours. The Apostle says: Pray without ceasing, which is to say that we must remember God all the time, wherever we are and whatever we are doing'.§ It is not without reason

² See note on p. 191

* We are thinking here of the invocation of *Amida Buddha* and of the formula *Om mani padme hum*, and as regards Hinduism, of the invocation of *Rāma* and *Krishna*.

† Similarly, according to the Christian perspective, Christ is not in the first place man, but God.

‡ In this commentary by St. John Damascenus the words 'invoke' and 'remember' are used to describe or illustrate the same idea; it will be recalled

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therefore that the Hesychasts consider the invocation of the Name of Jesus as having been bequeathed by Jesus to the Apostles: 'It is thus'—according to the *Century* of the Monks Callistus and Ignatius—"that our merciful and beloved Lord Jesus Christ, at the time when He came to His Passion freely accepted for us, and also at the time when, after His Resurrection, He visibly showed Himself to the Apostles, and even at the moment when He was about to reascend to the Father . . . bequeathed these three things to His disciples (the invocation of His Name, Peace and Love, which respectively correspond to faith, hope and charity). . . . The beginning of all activity of the Divine Love is the confident invocation of the Saving Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, as He Himself said (John xv. 5): "Without me ye can do nothing. . . ." By the confident invocation of the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we steadfastly hope to obtain His mercy and the True Life hidden in Him. It is like unto another Divine Source which is never exhausted (John iv. 14) and which yields up these gifts when the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ is invoked, without imperfection, in the heart.' We may also quote the following passage from an Epistle (*Epistula ad Monachos*) of St. John Chrysostom: 'I have heard the Fathers say: Who is this monk who forsakes and belittles the rule? He should, when eating and drinking, when seated or serving others, when walking or indeed when doing anything whatsoever, invoke unceasingly: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have pity on me."† Persevere unceasingly in the that the Arab word *dhikr* signifies both 'invocation' and 'remembrance'; in Buddhism also 'to think of *Buddha*' and 'to invoke *Buddha*' are expressed by one and the same word (*Buddhānusmriti*: the Chinese *nien-fo* and the Japanese *nembutsu*). On the other hand, it is worth noting that the Hesychasts and the Dervishes use the same word to describe invocation: the recitation of the 'prayer of Jesus' is called by the Hesychasts 'work', while the Dervishes name every form of invocation 'occupation' or 'business' (*shoghli*).

† This formula is often contracted to the Name of Jesus alone, particularly by those who are more advanced in the way. 'The most important means in the life of prayer is the *Name of God*, invoked in the prayer. Ascetics and all who lead a life of prayer, from the anchorites of the Egyptian desert to the Hesychasts of Mount Athos . . . insist above all on the importance of the Name of God. Apart from the Offices there exists for all the Orthodox a 'rule of prayer', composed of psalms and different orisons; for the monks it

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Name of our Lord Jesus that thy heart may drink the Lord and the Lord may drink thy heart, to the end that in this manner the two may become one.'

3

We must now meet a difficulty which arises from the fact that the invocation of the Name of Jesus seems to duplicate Communion, which at first sight appears to be the fundamental means of grace belonging to Christianity. In order to throw light on this question, it may be said first of all that although Christianity is initiatory in 'substance', an application corresponding to the exoteric point of view was nevertheless foreseen from the beginning. This paradox can be explained, as was pointed out in the last chapter, on the one hand by the excep-

is much more considerable. But the most important thing in prayer, the thing that constitutes its very heart, is what is named the prayer of Jesus: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have pity on me, a sinner.' The repetition of this prayer hundreds of times, and even indefinitely, is the essential element of every monastic rule of prayer; it can, if necessary, replace the Offices and all the other prayers, since its value is universal. The power of the prayer does not reside in its content, which is simple and clear (it is the prayer of the tax-gatherer), but in the sweet Name of Jesus. The ascetics bear witness that this Name contains the force of the presence of God. Not only is God invoked by this Name; He is already present in the invocation. This can certainly be said of every Name of God; but it is true above all of the Divine and human Name of Jesus, which is the proper Name of God and of man. In short, the Name of Jesus present in the human heart communicates to it the force of the deification accorded to us by the Redeemer.' (S. Boulgakoff: *L'Orthodoxie*).

'The Name of Jesus', says St. Bernard, 'is not only light; it is also nourishment. All food is too dry to be assimilated by the soul if it is not first flavoured by this condiment; it is too insipid unless this salt relieves its tastelessness. I have no taste for thy writings if I cannot read this Name there; no taste for thy discourse, if I do not hear it resounding therein. It is honey for my mouth, melody for my ears, joy for my heart, but it is also a medicine. Does any one among you feel overcome with sadness? Let him then taste Jesus in his mouth and heart, and behold how before the light of His Name all clouds vanish and the sky again becomes serene. Has one among you allowed himself to be led into a fault, and is he experiencing the temptation of despair? Let him invoke the Name of the Life and the Life will restore him.' (*Sermon 15 on the Song of Songs*.)

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tional character of the spiritual radiation issuing from Christ, and on the other hand by the fact that Christianity is a 'way of Grace' in which differences between spiritual planes reduce themselves more or less to differences of degree. This being the case, there is no contradiction in the fact that the Eucharist, despite its esoteric nature, has at the same time a function from the exoteric standpoint, and this double function is in fact marked by the difference between the two Eucharistic elements, the wine referring more particularly to the 'essential' and 'inward' function, and the bread to the 'adapted' and 'outward' function. The Eucharist guarantees a 'passive' participation in the Grace of Christ; but the fact that it is received passively, or in other words that the part of the communicant remains a purely receptive one, shows precisely that this means of Grace is not all-sufficing from an initiatory point of view, and that it must be 'developed' by another means of an 'active' nature. This complementary means, the application of which will remain strictly esoteric—since its 'active' nature prevents it from being accessible to all—is the ritual and methodic invocation of the saving Name of Jesus. Even from the exoteric point of view, Communion is not self-sufficient and must likewise be 'developed' by an active attitude, which in this case consists of 'works', extending from ordinary morality to expiatory disciplines. To return, however, to esotericism, the Eucharistic Grace which unites man virtually to Christ represents, in relation to the invocation of the Name of Jesus, a ceaselessly renewed point of departure, and the best one possible, for the way that leads from a passive and precarious participation in Christ to a permanent and active one, namely to identity with the 'Divine Nature'. This real, as distinct from a purely virtual, identity can only be obtained with the aid of a means of sanctification—or rather of 'deification'—which actively engages the being and so integrates him in the 'Divine Act', thereby enabling him finally to transcend the limits of 'human nature'.

This fundamental distinction between a sanctifying means of grace, to which there corresponds a passive attitude, and a deifying means of grace, the application of which is essentially

active, will perhaps be more readily understood with the help of an example taken from another traditional form: thus in Islam, to look no further, one finds a distinction between the ritual prayer common to all Moslems and the invocation of the Divine Name practised only by initiates. So as not to neglect anything which might help to make the matter clearer, we will recall again the other fundamental analogies existing between the two traditional forms, the Christian and the Islamic: thus the principal Reality which is manifested in Christianity in the form of the Redemption by Christ is manifested in Islam in the form of the Qoranic Revelation; the Redemption is perpetuated in the Eucharist which communicates the virtuality of effective Redemption—the latter, in its absolute and meta-cosmic sense, being actualized by means of the Name of Jesus—while the Qoranic Revelation, for its part, is perpetuated by ‘submission’ (*islām*) to the Divine Law, the ‘heart’ of which is the ritual prayer (*salāt*), and this ‘submission’ is made metaphysically perfect by means of the invocation of the Name of *Allāh*. This transcendence of the ‘deifying’ means of grace by comparison with the ‘sanctifying’ means is moreover clearly illustrated by the simple fact that a man may be prevented by his outward circumstances from taking communion or accomplishing the Islamic prayer, but not from invoking God, be it only in his inward consciousness; despite the contingent nature of this example, it nevertheless serves to show that invocation possesses a higher degree of universality than those means of grace which are exoterically applicable. There remains, however, a still more important criterion applicable in the present case, namely, that the invocation of the Name is in principle self-sufficient and can render the use of other means of grace superfluous, as is indeed laid down in the following passage from the *Mānava-Dharma-Shāstra*, the sacred Law of the Hindus: ‘There can be no doubt that a Brahmin will attain Beatitude by invocation (*japa*) alone, whether or not he accomplishes other rites.’ There exists in fact, even in Moslem countries, a category of spiritual men who do not accomplish the ordinary rites, an attitude which is based upon the initiatory meaning of the

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following verse of the Qoran: 'Make not the prayer when you are drunk' (that is to say in a state of spiritual drunkenness). The pre-eminence of the invocation over the ordinary rites is moreover also prefigured in the Gospel in the story of the good robber. This 'evil-doer'—that is to say, according to the esoteric interpretation, the being who acts in accordance with the cosmic illusion and who is 'crucified' by the vicissitudes of formal existence—was in fact saved by merely calling on Christ—who Himself also was subjected to the same vicissitudes, but voluntarily and without illusion—and integrated by the Grace of the 'Word made flesh' into 'Paradise', which, being described here as the dwelling-place of the Word, can be taken to signify the principal state, non-manifested and Divine.

In conclusion, it remains for us to say a few words concerning the intimate relationship existing between the eucharistic and incantatory methods, and this will enable their spontaneous complementarism to be more clearly seen. In the last analysis the Eucharist derives from the same symbolism, and therefore from the same Divine, cosmic and spiritual Reality, as invocation: the Christian communion,* in fact, relates to the symbolism

* It may be noticed that the Qoran recognizes the rite of communion and even indicates it as a spiritual means characteristic of Christ. " 'Oh Jesus, Son of Mary', said the Apostles, "is thy Lord able to send down a nourishment (*mā'idah*, meaning both nourishment and knowledge) to us out of Heaven?" He said: "Fear *Allāh* (by accomplishing what He requires of you) if you are believers." They said: "We desire to eat of it that our hearts (which are nourished on knowledge) may be assured and that we may know (in tasting this knowledge) that thou hast indeed taught us the truth, and that we may be witnesses thereof (to the world)." Jesus the Son of Mary said: "O God, Our Lord (*Allāhumma*)! Send down a nourishment for us out of Heaven that it may be a perpetual blessing (i.e. a means of grace) to the first and the last of us (that is to say, giving access to every spiritual degree), and a revelation (*ayah*, a supernatural sign) of Thee (of Thy Reality or Essence), and accord us our (spiritual) subsistence, for Thou art the best of Nourishers (since Thy nourishment is none other than Thyself)".' (Qoran, *sūrat-el-Mā'idah*, 112-114). The 'hearts' which are 'assured' are also referred to in a verse referring to invocation: '*Allāh* leads to Himself all those who turn to Him, who believe on Him (who attribute all reality to Him and not to the world) and whose hearts are assured (*tatma'innu qulūbuhum*) in the invocation (*dhikr* "remembrance" or "mention") of *Allāh*; is it not in the invocation of *Allāh* that hearts are assured?' (*surat Er-Ra'ad*, 27 and 28).

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of the mouth, as indeed does every category of invocation; however between invocation properly so called and its eucharistic mode there is this difference, namely, that in the latter the mouth is considered in its function of organ of nutrition, while in the former it is considered in its function of organ of speech. Between these two aspects of the mouth there is a strict symbolical link, which in the corporeal order is expressed precisely by the fact that the two faculties of speech and nutrition make use of the same organ.* This symbolical solidarity results moreover from the complexity of the eucharistic symbol itself: the Word which is 'spoken' by God being 'eaten' by man. In invocation, the symbol, which remains always fundamentally the same and thereby retains its efficacy whatever its mode, is applied inversely: it is man who 'speaks' the Word when pronouncing the Divine Name, and who, himself transformed into eucharistic bread by his 'second birth', is then absorbed by the Divine Mouth—an image which indicates the process of assimilation and identification of the individual 'fact' with the universal Principle.†

On the other hand, there is also an important connection between the invocation of the Divine Name and the birth of Christ: in the first case the Word issues from the mouth of man; in the second case it issues from the Virgin. This comparison

* Besides the two natural functions of the mouth, speaking and feeding, of which the sacred modalities are invocation and communion respectively—the latter being found in other traditions in the form of 'draughts of immortality' such as *amrita*, *soma*, *haoma*, nectar, ambrosia, the 'living water' of Christ—there is another natural function of the mouth, secondary in relation to the two others, namely the kiss, which is related to the symbolism of both speech and nutrition, and which refers in itself to the spiritual symbolism of love and adoration.

† There are certain *pratīkas*, or Hindu sacred images, which represent *Durgā* holding a human body between her teeth; this refers not only to the return, destructive from the point of view of manifestation, to the universal Essence, but also to re-integration by Knowledge. Speaking quite generally, it may be said that in the natural order a being is 'eaten' by the Divinity when he dies, and this has an important bearing on initiatory death in which man is sacrificially 'eaten' by God, that is to say, extinguished in Him and assimilated to Him. Christ is Word and Sacrifice at one and the same time, in the same way that the Universe comprises these two aspects.

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brings to light the symbolical analogy between speech and childbirth. It results from this analogy that the mouth of one who invokes God is identical with the Virgin (*Virgo genetrix*); 'virginity' is therefore an indispensable attribute of the mouth of the spiritual man. These analogies also throw into relief the relationship that exists between the reception of the Spirit of God by the body of the Virgin—a reception which is expressed in Genesis by 'the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters'—and the reception of the Eucharist by the mouth of man; the latter, symbolically identified with the Virgin, must be pure, that is to say in a state of sanctifying grace.

The body of Christ—or His individual substance—proceeds from the Virgin;* His Spirit is God; and by the same token that the body of Christ proceeds from the Virgin, and that the Spirit of Christ is God, so the Divine Name proceeds from the mouth of him that invokes, while the breath, which being of air comes from the heavens and fills and vivifies the mouth, corresponds to the 'Spirit which bloweth where it listeth'. Finally, in the same way that the Eucharist is the support of the 'Real Presence', of the *Shekinah* of the Holy of Holies of the Temple, so the Divine Name is the support of this same 'Presence'† residing in the Holy of Holies of the heart.

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(1) [See p. 179] This spiritual function of the body explains the sacredness which is attributed to nudity in some non-religious traditional forms, notably in Hinduism, the form which most nearly corresponds to the Primordial Tradition. This sacred aspect of nudity is indeed met with, if only exceptionally, in every traditional form, whether in the

* This is so because the universal body of the Word, namely, the manifested Universe, proceeds from the Universal Substance (*Prakriti*), of which the Virgin is a human manifestation.

† The central part that will be played by invocation at the time of the re-establishment of the Primordial Tradition by the Messiah (or *Kalki-Avatāra*) is expressed as follows by the Prophet Zephaniah: 'For then will I turn to the people a pure language that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent.' (Zeph. iii. 9).

symbolism itself or in the case of isolated spiritual personages: we need only recall the nudity of the crucified Christ, which is far from being without significance, or that attributed by Christian iconography to Saint Mary the Egyptian and sometimes to Saint Mary Magdalene. In a certain sense there exists a sort of symbolic opposition between the face and the body: the face represents in that case the individual and the mental faculty, while the body corresponds to the species and the Intellect; consequently the denuding of the body is capable of manifesting outwardly a penetration or 'transfiguration' of the body by the Intellect, and therefore a re-integration of the flesh into the state of primordial 'innocence'. In another respect the denuding of the body represents the spiritual exteriorization (the *jalwah* of Sufism) of what in the ordinary or 'hardened' man is inward and hidden. The body, having become a sanctuary of the 'Real Presence', thereby becomes sacred and 'radiates' in its turn, and for the spiritual man who affirms this corporeal 'glory' this also signifies the rupture of a profane or social bondage and the rejection of the artifices of the mind and so of individual limitations. On the other hand nudity—serving thus as a support of contemplation—may also express love towards the Creator whose Presence man feels in his consecrated flesh, which implies as a consequence the abolition of the artificial and specifically human limits—represented by clothing—which separate man from the rest of Creation. The naked body has not only an 'innocent' or 'child-like' aspect, due to the fact that it is the work and image of the Creator and in this respect 'good' and 'pure' like the primordial Creation itself, but it also possesses an aspect of 'nobility'—one might almost say of 'love'—because it reflects God's beauty by its own, or in other words, because it manifests the Divine Beatitude and Goodness, which preside over the Divine Act of Creation. Lastly the body possesses also an aspect of 'serenity' or 'reality', since it affirms 'that which really is', that is to say, the naked Truth, unique and formless, unobscured by the veils of arbitrary human thought. To say that the body symbolizes spiritual realities and even Divine Aspects—the former necessarily having a reference to the latter—amounts to saying that it really 'is' these realities and Aspects on its own plane of existence, and in consequence that the positive aspects of the body are metaphysically more real than its aspects of impurity and 'flesh'; and it is precisely this knowledge that sacred nudity affirms. Finally it may be added that the aspects of 'innocence', 'nobility' and 'serenity' refer respectively to the symbolism of the nudity of the new-born child, that of the body exalted in love and that of the corpse 'in the hands of him that washes the dead'.

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(2) [See p. 182.] The Psalms contain a number of references to the invocation of the Name of God: 'I call on the Lord with my voice, and He hears me from His holy mountain.' 'But I, I have called on the Name of the Lord. Lord, save my soul!' 'The Lord is near to all who call on Him, who call on Him from their hearts.' Two passages also contain a reference to the Eucharistic mode of invocation: 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' 'Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.' So also Isaiah: 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name: thou art mine.' 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.' And so Solomon in the Book of Wisdom: 'I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.'

The verse from the Prophet Joel quoted above situates the incantatory rite within the framework of a combination of conditions which are those obtaining at the end of the Dark Age (the Hindu *Kali-yuga*), but which also characterize, when considering the four ages taken together (the *Mahā-yuga*), the Dark Age as a whole. Now according to the *Vishnu-Dharma-Uttara* 'that which is obtained by meditation in the age of *Krita*, by sacrifice in the age of *Treta*, by devotion in the age of *Dwapara*, is obtained in the *Kali* age by celebrating *Keshava*' (*Vishnu*). 'The repetition of His Name, Oh *Maitreya*, is for faults the equivalent of fire for metals.' 'Water suffices to put out fire, the sunrise to disperse the darkness; in the *Kali* age the repetition of the Name of *Hari* (*Vishnu*) suffices to destroy all errors.' Again, the *Mānava-Dharma-Shāstra* says: 'There is no doubt that a Brahmin obtains Beatitude by invocation only.' Here are some analogous Buddhist texts: 'In the present age, which belongs to the fourth half-millennium after *Buddha*, what we have to do is to repent of our transgressions, cultivate the virtues and pronounce the Name of *Buddha*. Is it not said that to think of the *Buddha Amitābha* and to pronounce His Name . . . purifies us of all transgressions committed by us in all our lives during eighty thousand million *kalpas*?' 'The faithful one (the initiated) must utter without interruption (St. Paul says: 'Pray without ceasing') the Name of *Buddha* with one sole thought, leaving no room in his mind for anything else, and he is then sure to be re-born in the presence of *Buddha*, (Tao-Ch'o, a Chinese Master). 'Because beings endowed with sensible faculties meet many obstacles in their road, and the world in which they live is full of subtle temptations: because (in the 'present age' or 'latter days', and above all as the end of this epoch is approached) their thoughts are too perplexed, their intelligence too clumsy and their minds too distraught. . . . Taking pity on them, *Buddha* counsels them to concentrate on the recitation of His Name, for when it is practised with-

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out interruption the faithful one is certain to be re-born in the Land of *Amida*' (Shan-Tao, a Chinese Master). 'For one who is absorbed in the Name of *Buddha*, which is above time, there is a rebirth which knows neither beginning nor end.' 'There is only the Name of *Buddha* and outside it exists neither he who utters it nor he to whom it is uttered. There is only the Name of *Buddha* and outside it there is no rebirth. All things that exist are virtues included in the body of the Name of *Buddha* itself. . . . It is better to be possessed by the Name than to possess the Name. All things are of one spirit, but this Spirit is not manifested by Itself. The eye cannot see itself . . . but hold a mirror in front of you and the eye will be able to see itself, such is the virtue of the mirror. And the mirror is one that each one of us possesses and which is called the great mirror of illumination; it is the Name already realized by all the *Buddhas*' (Ippen, a Japanese Master: see Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki: *Essays in Zen Buddhism*). Regarding the Hindu *japa*, and indeed invocation in general, there are some instructive observations in the teaching of Shri Ramakrishna.

The following is a selection of quotations from the numerous verses of the Qoran referring to invocation: 'Mention Me, and I will mention you.' 'To *Allāh* belong the most beautiful Names: call on Him by them!' 'Oh Believers! when you are face to face with an armed troop, be resolute and repeat without ceasing the name of *Allāh* that you may prosper.' '*Allāh* leads to Himself all those who turn to Him, who believe in Him and those hearts are assured in the invocation of *Allāh*; is it not by the invocation of *Allāh* that hearts are assured?' 'Who speaks a better word than he who calls on *Allāh*?' 'Your Lord has said: Call Me and I will answer you.' 'It is certain that the invocation of *Allāh* is of all things the greatest.'

We will also quote the following *ahādīth* of the Prophet: 'Whenever men gather together to invoke *Allāh*, they are surrounded by Angels, the Divine Favour envelops them, and Peace (*Sakinah*) descends upon them, and *Allāh* remembers them in His assembly.' 'There is a means of polishing all things whereby rust may be removed; that which polishes the heart is the invocation of *Allāh* and there is no act which removes the punishment of *Allāh* further from you than this invocation.' The Companions said: Is not the battle against unbelievers equal to it? The Prophet replied: 'No, not even if you fight on until your sword is shattered.'

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